Thomism

REVISITED

EDITED BY

GAVEN KERR

THOMISM REVISITED

Thomism is a philosophical and theological body of ideas that arose as a legacy of the work and thought of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). It holds that there are enduring philosophical questions about reality, knowledge, and value; that Thomism offers an ever-relevant set of answers to these; and that these answers constitute an integrated philosophical system. With periodic revivals, Thomism has exerted influence over philosophical and theological thinkers for many centuries. In this volume, leading specialists in Aquinas's thought revisit Thomism and assess how it is viewed today. They analyze its key features and show how it can speak to modern concerns not only in philosophy and theology but also in contemporary science, biology, and political theory. The volume will appeal to scholars and graduate students in philosophy, theology, and related disciplines, and to all who are interested in the continuing power and development of Thomism.

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St Patrick's Pontifical University, Maynooth

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Introduction

Gaven Kerr

Thomism is a tradition of thought that has attracted adherents through the centuries. It goes without saying that Thomists recognize the decisive genius of St. Thomas Aquinas. But a commitment to Thomism is not just a commitment to the man, despite whatever admiration we may have for his personal character. Thomism is adopted because it is recognized that the way of thinking involved therein conveys something important, indeed true, about a significant aspect of reality. It is precisely because Aquinas's way of thought conveys something of the truth that people have been prepared to adopt and defend it through the centuries; hence we have a tradition of thought that is Thomism.

With the upheavals in modern philosophy and the move out of the universities, the scholastic schools were generally seen to be relics of the past engaged in hair-splitting matters that did not advance beyond making distinctions. Descartes himself, who had been educated in such schools, poured disdain on them and announced his desire to branch out independently. This was the general attitude of modern thinkers – not to be chained to a school but to be independent and to think independently. With the latter there emerged a focus on one's personal thought, and it became an urgent task to establish the veracity of the very act of thinking. No thinking could be done unless the act of thinking itself could be established as veridical; hence any adoption of a system of thought or adherence to a school was suspect. Nevertheless, Thomism survived in the universities and in the religious orders, and indeed managed to foster several significant thinkers in their own right. Again, it is because Thomism seems to get at the truth of things that it has always attracted adherents.

The importance of Thomistic philosophy for Catholic theology is undeniable, and this was formally recognized by Pope Leo XIII in his publication of *Aeterni Patris* (1879), calling for Catholic universities to prioritize the teaching of Thomism as against the systems of modern

philosophy prevalent at the time. This brought about a renaissance within Thomism and in the early twentieth century a definite movement came to be identified as "Neo-Thomism." The Neo-Thomist movement fostered important philosophers and theologians of the twentieth century, much of whose work is considered by Thomists today and discussed in the pages of this volume. Contemporary Thomists cannot engage with the thought of Aquinas and advance the tradition of Thomism without considering the work of Gilson, Maritain, and Garrigou-Lagrange, to name just a few.

The Neo-Thomists were not just devotees of a historical school of thought; rather, they took that thought to be capable of addressing issues brought to the fore in modern philosophy. Naturally, these issues focused on the mind–world relation, and within Neo-Thomism itself there were to be found differing attitudes concerning how to articulate and defend Aquinas's realism as against modern challenges to the very notion that mentality can have a grasp on reality. Thus there developed traditions within a tradition. Not only that, but the predominance of Aquinas as a theologian and his theological thought came to be challenged with the emergence of the new theology and the embrace of non-Thomistic ways of philosophizing for theology. In effect, the new theologians moved away from the strict intellectualism of St. Thomas and embraced a philosophy less abstract and more rooted in lived experience. This led to a flourishing in theological dialogue, particularly between members of the Dominican and Jesuit religious orders. What occured was an appropriation of the thought of Aquinas in order to meet the concerns of the day. The latter in turn led to a flourishing in Thomism, for it challenged the followers of Aquinas to consider ways of thinking unknown to Thomas himself and in turn how one influenced by Aquinas would respond.

Despite the flourishing of Thomism and the very public careers of Neo-Thomists such as Gilson and Maritain, the wider philosophical world was somewhat unconscious of Thomism. Outside of the Catholic and Thomistic world, philosophy proceeded apace in the newly born analytical and continental traditions. Although historians disagree as to the birth of each of these traditions, a definite turning point occurred in the divergence between Frege and Husserl over the account of meaning, with Frege's focus on language and Husserl's on consciousness. The analytical tradition initially set deep roots into the philosophy of language, and, coupled with the logical positivists' insistence on the verification principle in analytical philosophy, became very anti-metaphysical. On the other hand, while not explicitly anti-metaphysical, the continental tradition was not typically disposed to the kind of metaphysics that we find within

the thought of Aquinas or the scholastics. Even with the appearance of Heidegger's *Being and Time* and his focus on the question of being, it was difficult to see the affinities between the kind of metaphysics practiced by Aquinas and the scholastics and Heidegger. Accordingly, these traditions of philosophy developed independently in the twentieth century.

Étienne Gilson once stated that philosophy buries its undertakers. We can perhaps modify that in the case of the analytical tradition to say that metaphysics buries its undertakers. This is because students of those early analytical philosophers who confidently announced the death of metaphysics in turn developed ways of philosophizing that brought about a return of metaphysical ways of thinking. Willard Van Orman Quine was a devotee of Rudolf Carnap, the latter of whom announced the demise of metaphysics through the logical analysis of language. While devoted to Carnap, Quine published several important papers that shattered the positivistic grip on analytic philosophy and enabled later thinkers to engage in metaphysics. "On What There Is" was first published in 1948 and therein Quine argued that the philosopher armed with logic can legitimately consider ontological questions as to what there is. Later Quine published "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" in 1951. This was by far Quine's most important contribution to the theory of meaning in analytical philosophy. Herein he argued that the analytic/synthetic distinction is not well established and that propositions do not face the tribunal of experience individually but as a whole. By this point, the positivistic project for analytical philosophy was shattered and the way was opened for different ways of philosophizing.

With the focus on modal logic and semantics, the work of Alvin Plantinga, Hilary Putnam, and Saul Kripke enabled analytical philosophers to think about reality in terms of possible worlds. This in turn led to the acceptance by certain analytical philosophers of necessary or essential properties possessed by a thing in all possible worlds in which it exists (and with Kripke it led to the surprising reemergence of dualism in philosophy of mind). Effectively, within a generation analytical philosophers had gone from a confident rejection of metaphysics to embracing possible worlds and some form of essentialism. At the same time, analytical philosophers were looking at influences outside of their tradition and discovered in Aristotle and some of the scholastics affinities with their own thought. Furthermore, developments in epistemology, ethics, and action theory led analytical philosophers to discover other thinkers in the history of philosophy either directly influenced by Aquinas and the

scholastics or not hostile thereto. All of this provided very fertile ground for engagement for Thomists.

In analytical metaphysics, Thomists have engaged on the questions of essence and existence, matter and form, change, causality, and so on. In epistemology, Thomists have addressed issues pertaining to mind and world and intentionality, and have found surprising allies in the post-Hegelian-inspired Pittsburgh school. In ethics and action theory, Thomists have helped to rehabilitate virtue ethics, and indeed the work of Elizabeth Anscombe (an anomaly in mid-twentieth-century analytic philosophy in many ways) has received high praise, with Donald Davidson describing her work on intention as the greatest work in philosophy of action since Aristotle. The engagement with analytic philosophy by Thomists continues to this day and bears witness in the chapters that follow. But contemporary engagement is not restricted to the analytic tradition.

Within the continental tradition, Thomists have noted that the most fundamental metaphysical principle is the act of existence or *esse*, and such focus on this has led to fruitful dialogue between Thomists and continental philosophers. The work of Cornelio Fabro in the mid-twentieth century was pioneering in this regard, and that project has continued to include Thomists currently alive today.

All of this is a mere sketch of the place of Thomism within the history of thought and how, since the publication of *Aeterni Patris*, Thomism has been able to embrace and morph around contemporaneous philosophical and theological concerns. What the last 150 years establish is that Thomism is not some rigid system that dutifully cashes out predesignated answers to whatever philosophical or theological question is asked of it. Rather, as a system of thought it is governed by principles that enable that thinking to address questions and challenges not contained within that system itself. As with those throughout the centuries, Thomists working and thriving in the twenty-first century are dealing with issues with which St. Thomas himself did not have to deal. In order to do so, they do not just have to be experts in Thomistic metaphysics, epistemology, theology, and so on; they have to be specialists in metaphysics in general, epistemology in general, theology in general, and so on. In other words, they have to embrace all that philosophical and theological thought has to offer and proceed to get to the truth of the matter; they have to do for the twenty-first century what Thomas did for the thirteenth.

I am pleased to open this volume on Thomism revisited by noting that the contributors involved are not mere Thomists; rather, in their own individual ways, they strive to emulate Thomas. Each of their

contributions adopts a Thomistic position, yet it does not do so in isolation but in dialogue with other thinkers. Not only that, but the breadth of contributions, from metaphysics to epistemology to action theory and ethics, even to philosophizing for theology, shows that Thomism is capable of addressing issues of contemporary concern in a fruitful manner. In this respect, the authors are both revisiting and developing Thomism.

Everyone who engages with Thomism is struck (for good or ill) by the importance and value placed upon metaphysics. Aquinas's metaphysical thought seeps into all aspects of his philosophy and theology. Herein that metaphysical thought is well represented. Gloria Frost outlines Aquinas's metaphysics of causation, James Dominic Rooney presents us with a contemporary reading of form, and William M. R. Simpson presents a scientifically respectable account of prime matter. Epistemology quite naturally follows metaphysics, and Jonathan Fuqua offers a chapter on Aquinas's realist epistemology, taking us through the twists and turns of the Neo-Thomistic engagement therewith.

Moving to philosophical anthropology and ethics, Caitlin Smith Gilson offers us a Thomistic account of personhood, one that engages with thinkers of the continental and postmodern traditions. Following the latter, we are met with two issues of significant contemporary importance: (i) disability and (ii) feminism. Catherine Peters presents a Thomistic account of disability and Jordan McFadden outlines the somewhat thorny relationship between Thomism and feminism. Patrick Lee's chapter is a treatment of life and death issues within Thomistic thought, and Heidi Giebel and Janice Tzuling Chik consider issues pertaining to living the good life and free expression.

St. Thomas is well known for his consideration of issues pertaining to theology and religious belief. Indeed, one of the strengths of Thomism is that it can navigate these issues from a purely philosophical and thus rational perspective. In this regard, Edward Feser offers a chapter defending Aquinas's classical theism, whereas W. Matthews Grant defends Aquinas's doctrine of divine simplicity against contemporary objections. Remaining with the issue of religious belief, Matthew K. Minerd's chapter addresses the kind of philosophy needed for theology in the twenty-first century, and in doing so charts the border between faith and reason. Finally, Joshua Furnal shows how Aquinas's metaphysics of *esse* leads to fruitful dialogue between Thomism and contemporary existentialism.

I shall not endeavor to summarize the chapters as they speak for themselves. What these contributions show is that Thomism is a tradition of thought that is well represented across the academic world.

The current series from Cambridge University Press aims to bring together substantial, multiauthored volumes on important philosophical movements and schools. The chapters in this volume establish that Thomism addresses issues across the philosophical and theological spectrum, and it can do so not by mere adherence to a historical figure but through the assimilation and development of that figure's thought to contemporary areas of concern. Hence Thomism indeed merits having a volume of committed scholars contribute to it, and I hereby present to you *Thomism Revisited*.

CHAPTER 1

Aquinas on Causation

Gloria Frost

1 Introduction

When something changes around us, we often try to find the cause of the change. For example, if a tree falls down, we seek to find out whether it fell due to old age or if it was knocked down by a storm. Our explanations of events usually involve their causal histories. Once we know the causes of certain types of effects, we can predict and even bring about similar effects in the future. Causation is very important to our understanding of the world and our daily living. Accordingly, philosophers in every period have developed theories about causation. Philosophical theories of causation seek to identify what sort of entities causes are and the features that characterize the relationship between causes and effects. For example, when fire burns cotton, is the fire or the fire's heat or the person who lit the fire the cause of burning? Did the presence of whatever caused the burning necessitate burning or only make it probable?

This chapter will present the main elements of Aquinas's views on natural causation. Natural causation involves nonrational entities and processes in the material world. Aquinas never wrote a separate treatise on causation, yet in the context of addressing other topics, he writes about causation in all of his major works. This chapter uses text from throughout Aquinas's corpus to reconstruct the main elements of his views on causation.[1] To highlight the philosophical significance of his views, the

[1] The views attributed to Aquinas in this chapter are developed and analyzed in more detail in Gloria Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). For other literature on Aquinas's views on causation, see Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon St. Thomas D'aquin* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1961); Joseph Finance, *Être et agir dans la philosophie de Saint Thomas* (Paris: Beauchesne et Ses Fils, 1945); Francis X. Meehan, *Efficient Causality in Aristotle and St. Thomas* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1940); and Michael Rota, "Causation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, ed. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 104–114.

chapter then presents two prominent contemporary theories of causation, Humeanism and Nomicism, and discusses the advantages of Aquinas's when compared with these rival theories.

2 Aquinas on Causation

2.1 The Nature of Causation

In Aquinas's view, the relationship between causes and their effects is characterized by existential dependence. He writes regarding causes in general: "The name cause implies a certain influence on the being of the thing caused."[2] Elsewhere he writes: "It is necessary for an effect to depend on its cause. This is part of the notion of effect and cause."[3] In Aquinas's view, effects depend on their causes for their existence, and causes give rise to the existence of their effects. However, causes need not bring their effects into being *simpliciter*. A cause may be responsible for something that already exists coming to exist in a new way. For example, the sun might cause an already existing Socrates to be tanned. It is noteworthy that Aquinas understands the relationship between cause and effect in terms of ontological dependence because, as we will see, rival accounts understand causation as a merely logical or conceptual relation between ontologically separate events.

2.2 The Four Causes

Because Aquinas views the relationship between cause and effect as ontological dependence, he acknowledges any instance in which one thing depends on another as a type of causation. This leads to a much broader conception of causation than contemporary philosophers typically have. Contemporary philosophers usually restrict the concept of a cause to those things that bring about events. Aquinas, following Aristotle, identified four species of cause: formal, material, efficient, and final.[4] Each of the four causes influences the being of its effect in a different way. Aquinas adopts Aristotle's hylomorphism, which is the view that material substances are

[2] *In V Meta*. lec. 1 (ed. Marietti, 208, n. 751): Hoc vero nomen causa, importat influxum quemdam ad esse causati.

[3] *Quaestiones disputatae de potentia Dei* (Turin: Marietti, 1965), q. 5, a. 1: Effectum enim a sua causa dependere oportet. Hoc enim est de ratione effectus et causae.

[4] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 27, art. 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 8, 226): Est autem quadruplex genus causae: scilicet finalis, formalis, efficiens et materialis. For an extended discussion of the four causes, see Aquinas's *De principiis naturae*, especially chapters 1–4.

composed of matter and form.[5] The matter of a substance influences the being of the substance as that out of which it is made, as clay is that out of which a statue is made. The form influences the being of the substance by actualizing matter in a specific way. The form of a tree, for example, actualizes matter in such a way that the form and matter together compose a tree rather than a rabbit or some other type of substance. Since material substances depend on both their matter and their form to exist, but on each in a different way, material and formal causation are two species of causation.

Efficient causes are the species of cause that most closely corresponds to the contemporary notion of a cause. Efficient causes are causes of motions and changes. Today we tend to equate "motion" with locomotion; that is, movement from one place to another. Aquinas, however, understands motion in a much broader way to encompass qualitative and quantitative changes as well. Motion is the process by which a substance gains one form while losing another contrary form.[6] Heating, for example, is the motion through which a substance gains the form of heat while losing the form of cold. Matter cannot cause itself to gain a new form or lose an old one. For example, lukewarm water cannot make itself hot. The efficient cause is the cause that is responsible for inducing forms in matter by causing motions or changes.[7] Since created efficient causes cause their effects by causing motion, Aquinas sometimes refers to created efficient causes as "movers" or "principles of motion."[8] The effect of a natural efficient cause is both the motion it initiates in its patient and the form that is the terminus of that motion.[9] Aquinas thinks that the unique way that efficient causes exercise their causality is by acting through active powers.[10] Since efficient causes are causes that act, he also calls them "agents" (*agens* in Latin, which literally translates as "acting one").

[5] On Aquinas's hylomorphism, see Jeffrey Brower, *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[6] *In V Phys*. lec. 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 238): Omnis enim motus est mutatio ab una specie determinata in aliam speciem determinatam.

[7] *De pot.* qu. 5, art. 1: Nam efficiens est causa rei secundum quod formam inducit, vel materiam disponit.

[8] *In I Meta.* lec. 4 (ed. Marietti, 23, n. 70): causa est efficiens, quae est unde principium motus. I use the qualifier "created" in this sentence since Aquinas thinks that God is an efficient cause who does not cause effects through motion at least when he creates. On this topic, see Julie Swanstrom, "Creation as Efficient Causation in Aquinas," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93:1 (2019): 1–27.

[9] For a passage in which Aquinas claims the form is the effect of the agent, see *De malo*, qu. 5, art. 5 ad 16.

[10] *In V Meta*. lec. 2 (ed. Marietti, 213, n. 775): Nam efficiens est causa inquantum agit. *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, cap. 60 (ed. Marietti, 191, n. 1375): Nihil est potens agere nisi per potentiam activam in ipso existentem.

Aquinas thinks that efficient causes exercise their causality for the sake of a goal or end. This is the final cause. Typical examples of final causality involve rational beings acting for a purpose that they understand, such as a person who takes a walk for the sake of being healthy. However, Aquinas thinks that even natural, non-cognizant efficient causes act on account of final causes.[11] In the next section, we will look more closely at the details of Aquinas's views on efficient causation.

3 The Elements of Paradigm Instances of Efficient Causation

In Aquinas's view, paradigm instances of efficient causation in the natural world involve one substance causing a motion or change in another substance for the sake of an end or goal. (We will see later that Aquinas also admits some nonstandard instances of efficient causation, which happen in virtue of the paradigm instances.) The agent is the entity that causes a motion or change and the patient is that which undergoes the change. For example, when Socrates gets more tanned, the sun is the agent and Socrates is the patient. Aquinas thinks that agents and patients are always complete substances rather than their metaphysical parts.[12] It is the sun that is the agent of tanning, not the sun's light or its heat. Socrates gets more tanned, not his skin. Although Aquinas thinks complete substances are what act upon and react to one another, he nevertheless recognizes that agents are able to exercise causality and patients are able to undergo it because of their intrinsic active and passive features. Aquinas writes: "For every action, there are two things to consider, namely the thing itself which acts, and the power [*virtutem*] by which it acts, just as fire heats through heat."[13] Active powers are the features of agents that enable them to perform actions. Passive powers are the features of patients through which they undergo the agent's action.[14]

[11] See, for instance, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, cap. 2–3.

[12] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 58, art. 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 9, 10): Actiones autem sunt suppositorum et totorum, non autem, proprie loquendo, partium et formarum, seu potentiarum: non enim proprie dicitur quod manus percutiat, sed homo per manum; neque proprie dicitur quod calor calefaciat, sed ignis per calorem. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 75, art. 2 ad 2; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 77, art. 1 ad 3 and *Quaestiones Disputate de anima* 12.

[13] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 3, cap. 70 (ed. Marietti, 99, n. 2464): In quolibet enim agente est duo considerare, scilicet rem ipsam quae agit, et virtutem qua agit: sicut ignis calefacit per calorem. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 36, art. 3 ad 1.

[14] *De operat. occult.* (ed. Leon., vol. 43, 184): dicimus potentiam principium intrinsecum quo agens agit, uel patiens patitur.

Aquinas understands material substances' active and passive powers through the lens of his Aristotelian hylomorphism. He thinks that material substances are active through their forms and passive through their matter. Aquinas writes in his *Summa Theologiae*: "The potentiality for being is from the part of matter, which is a being in potentiality, but the potentiality for acting is from the part of form."[15] His conception of form and matter as active and passive is rooted in his view that form and matter relate to each other as potentiality and actuality. He writes in his *Summa contra Gentiles*: "It is manifest that a body cannot act through its whole self since it is composed of matter, which is a being in potentiality, and of form, which is actuality: for any being acts in so far as it is in act."[16] As a principle of potentiality, matter is capable of being perfected and completed, yet of itself it is imperfect and incomplete. Form, by contrast, is a principle of perfection that brings completion to that which receives it. A well-known example used to illustrate the relationship of potentiality and actuality and the respective roles of form and matter is a shapeless lump of clay that is later sculpted into a determinate object. Of itself, the lump of clay is imperfect and incomplete since it is not any type of thing, yet it is nevertheless something that can be completed and perfected. The shapes that can be actualized in it are principles of perfection and completion since through them the clay becomes something in actuality.

Aquinas thinks that forms are principles of activity, while matter is inactive, since he sees activity as connected with actuality. Actuality is a principle of perfection and completion and, following the neo-Platonic tradition, Aquinas thinks that whatever is good or perfect necessarily seeks to communicate its goodness to another. He writes: "Communication of being and goodness arises from the good. This is evident from the very nature of the good and from its definition [*ratione*]."[17] It is part of the very nature of goodness to make others good as well. Existing in a certain way in

[15] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 55, art. 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 6, 351): Sed potentia ad esse se tenet ex parte materiae, quae est ens in potentia, potentia autem ad agere se tenet ex parte formae. See also *In II Sent*. dist. 30, qu. 2, art. 2 (ed. Mandonnet–Moos, 791): Virtus activa non est ex parte materiae, sed magis ex parte formalis.

[16] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 3, cap. 69 (ed. Marietti, 98, n. 2496): Manifestum est enim quod corpus non potest agere se toto, cum sit compositum ex materia, quae est ens in potentia, et ex forma, quae est actus: agit enim unumquodque secundum quod est actu.

[17] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, cap. 37 (ed. Marietti, 47, n. 307): Communicatio esse et bonitatis ex bonitate procedit. Quod quidem patet et ex ipsa natura boni, et ex eius ratione. See also *In IV Sent.* dist. 46, qu. 2, art. 1, qc. 2 (ed. Parma, vol. 7/2, 1143): Bonitas ergo respicit communicationem perfectionis, quia bonum est diffusivum sui esse. For relevant literature, see Julien Péghaire, "L'axiome 'bonum est diffusivum sui' dans le néoplatonisme et le thomisme," *Revue de l'Université d'Ottawa*, January–March (1932): 5–30.

actuality is a type of good.[18] So, Aquinas thinks that beings that are actual act through the principle by which they are in actuality – that is, their forms – to make other beings actual in the same way. He writes: "To act towards some effect is proper to a being-in-act: for each one acts in so far as it is in act. Therefore, every being in act is apt to make something existing in act."[19]

In Aquinas's view, the forms that actualize matter are by their nature ordered toward the further actuality of causal activity. Just as matter is a potentiality for form, so too is form a potentiality for action. He writes: "The imperfect is always for the sake of the more perfect. Just as matter is for the sake of form which is first actuality, first actuality is for the sake of its operation which is second actuality."[20] Elsewhere he similarly writes: "But first act is said to be in potentiality with respect to second act which is operation."[21] On Aquinas's view, forms are not merely for the sake actualizing matter. Rather, they have a further purpose as sources of causal activity.

Aquinas's conception of form as a diffusive good explains both why agents are active through their forms and what sort of effect each agent is apt to produce.[22] Thus, Aquinas's view that forms are active because they are principles of goodness and perfection has implications for his understanding of the final cause – that is, the end or goal – for which agents act.

[18] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 1, cap. 37 (ed. Marietti, 47, n. 306): Esse igitur actu boni rationem constituit.

[19] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, cap. 6 (ed. Marietti, 118, n. 881): Agere autem aliquem effectum per se convenit enti in actu: nam unumquodque agens secundum hoc agit quod in actu est. Omne igitur ens actu natum est agere aliquid actu existens. For discussion of Aquinas's use of the principle "everything acts in so far as it is in act," see Kendall Fisher, "Thomas Aquinas on Hylomorphism and the In-Act Principle," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25:6 (2017): 1053–1072 and Norris Clarke, "Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas," in *Explorations in Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1994), 45–64.

[20] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 105, art. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, 475): Semper enim imperfectum est propter perfectius: sicut igitur materia est propter formam, ita forma, quae est actus primus, est propter suam operationem, quae est actus secundus. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 76, art. 4 ad 1 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, 224): Sed actus primus dicitur in potentia respectu actus secundi, qui est operatio; *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa qu. 13, art. 1 (ed. Leon., vol. 11, 171): Potentia autem activa cuiuslibet rei sequitur formam ipsius, quae est principium agendi. Forma autem vel est ipsa natura rei, sicut in simplicibus: vel est constituens ipsam rei naturam, in his scilicet quae sunt composita ex materia et forma. Unde manifestum est quod potentia activa cuiuslibet rei consequitur naturam ipsius.

[21] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 76, art. 4 ad 1 (ed. Leon., vol. 5, 224): Sed actus primus dicitur in potentia respectu actus secundi, qui est operatio.

[22] While every form is a principle of activity in virtue of being a principle of actuality, some forms are only active principles of intellection and sensation. For example, redness is not a principle for making other things red materially but is an active principle through which the sensation and intellection of redness happens. On Aquinas's views regarding which forms are active principles of material change, see Frost, *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*, 106–110.

He believes that, through their forms, substances are ordered toward the goal of making another have the same form. Aquinas writes: "The proximate end of each agent is to induce a similitude of its form in another, just as the end of fire's heating is to induce a similitude of its heat in the patient."[23] Good things do not make other things good in any random way; rather, they seek to make other things good in the same way that they are good. This explains why natural agents act toward a single, determinate effect. Aquinas writes: "every natural agent acts toward a determinate species because every agent makes its like."[24] A standard objection to natural teleology is the question of how non-cognizant beings can act for ends or goals if they cannot understand them. In Aquinas's view, teleology, as such, is not grounded in an agent's cognizing and consciously desiring a goal. Rather, teleology is grounded in the self-diffusive character of goodness. In virtue of the self-diffusive nature of goodness, all beings that are good in a particular way are ordered in virtue of their goodness toward producing that same manner of goodness in another.

So far, we have seen that Aquinas conceives of form as active power and he thinks that the final cause of natural agents is to induce their form in another. In line with these views, Aquinas conceives of an agent's action as the communicating of its form to another. He writes in his *De potentia*: "To act is nothing other than to communicate that by which the agent is in act in so far as it is possible."[25] In his *Commentary on the Sentences*, he similarly writes: "In any alteration or generation the agent multiplies its form in matter."[26] He explicitly states that the agent does not hand over its own form to the patient or deposit something extrinsic into the patient.[27]

[23] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 7 (ed. Leon., vol. 10, 16): Finis autem proximus uniuscuiusque agentis est ut similitudinem suae formae in alterum inducat: sicut finis ignis calefacientis est ut inducat similitudinem sui caloris in patiente.

[24] *In X Meta.* lec. 11 (ed. Marietti, 503, n. 2134): omne agens naturale agit ad determinatam speciem, quia agit sibi simile. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 44, art. 4 ad 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, 461–462): forma generati non est finis generationis nisi inquantum est similitudo formae generantis, quod suam similitudinem communicare intendit.

[25] *De pot.* q. 2, a. 1: Unde unumquodque agens agit secundum quod in actu est. Agere vero nihil aliud est quam communicare illud per quod agens est actu, secundum quod est possibile. See also *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 3, cap. 52 (ed. Marietti, 71, n. 2292): Forma alicuius propria non fit alterius nisi eo agente: *agens* enim facit *sibi simile* inquantum formam suam alteri communicat.

[26] *In II Sent.* dist. 30, qu. 2, art. 1 (ed. Mandonnet–Moos, vol. 2, 780): in qualibet alteratione et generatione, quod agens multiplicat formam suam in materia.

[27] See, for instance, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 3, cap. 69 (ed. Marietti, 98, n. 2458): Agens enim naturale non est traducens propriam formam in alterum subiectum: sed reducens subiectum quod patitur, de potentia in actum. See also *De spirit. creat.* art. 2 ad 8 and *De pot.* qu. 3, art. 8 ad 10: patet enim quod non perficitur esse formae in materia alio exteriori addito, quod in potentia materiae non esset. Aquinas explains why it is metaphysically impossible for numerically the same form to be passed from one substance to another in *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa qu. 77, art. 1.

Rather, the agent forms the patient's matter to be actualized with a form like its own. This brings us to the role of matter in causal interactions.

Matter has an important role in Aquinas's model for understanding material causal interactions. While forms are the principles through which agents act, matter is the principle through which material substances undergo action. He writes: "No thing, whatever its degree of materiality, receives anything according to that which is form in it, but only according to that which is material in it . . . Corporeal things do not receive any impression in virtue of form, but only in virtue of matter."[28] Patients are able to be acted upon by agents because they have a component – that is, matter – which is able to be formed. The complementarity between form and matter is what allows agents to act and patients to suffer. Aquinas writes: "There is mutual action in corporeal substances because the matter of one is in potentiality to the form of the other and vice versa."[29] Aquinas makes clear in certain passages that it is not prime matter – that is, matter devoid of any form – through which substances undergo change. Rather, substances undergo determinate types of change through their matter taken together with specific forms that actualize it. For example, Aquinas states that through being actualized by the form of dryness, a substance is combustible.[30] It is through its matter that a substance can receive form in general, but in order to receive the specific forms proper to the change of combustion, a substance's matter must be prepared by the form of dryness since wet substances cannot undergo combustion. Aquinas believes that for every active power, there is a determinate type of passive power.[31] This is to say that for every form that can be communicated, there is a determinate potentiality for receiving that form. It is through its matter and specific forms that actualize it that a substance has determinate passive potentialities.

[28] *De ver.* qu. 9, art. 1 ad 12 (ed. Leon., 22 2/1, 282): Ad duodecimum dicendum, quod nulla res, quantumcumque materialis, recipit aliquid secundum id quod est formale in ipsa, sed solum secundum id quod est materiale in ea . . . res corporales non recipiunt aliquam impressionem ex parte formae, sed ex parte materiae.

[29] *De pot.* qu. 3, art. 7: est mutua actio in substantiis corporalibus, cum materia unius sit in potentia forma alterius, et e converso. See also *In III Phys.* lec. 2 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 106): Et quia omnia corpora naturalia inferiora communicant in materia, ideo in unoquoque est potentia ad id quod est actu in altero: et ideo in omnibus talibus aliquid simul agit et patitur, et movet et movetur. See also *In III Sent.* dist. 1, qu. 1, art. 1 ad 3 (ed. Mandonnet–Moos, 10).

[30] *Q.D. de anima* qu. 12 (ed. Leon., vol. 24/1, 108): siccum est potentia in lignis, quia secundum hoc sunt combustibilia.

[31] *In IX Meta.* lec. 6 (ed. Marietti, 440, n. 1834): Quibuslibet enim activis respondent determinata passiva.

4 Non-paradigm Instances of Efficient Causation

Earlier we saw Aquinas's views on the elements involved in the most standard and central instances of efficient causation. In these cases, an agent exercises an active power to produce an effect in a patient. The agent acts for the sake of producing a form like its own in its patient. Experience of the world reveals that there are many interactions between material substances that seem to be instances of causation, and yet they do not fit this paradigm. Aquinas recognized this and admitted that there were other nonstandard cases of efficient causation and he classifies them into types. In this section, we will examine them.

4.1 Per Se *versus* Per Accidens *Efficient Causation*

Aquinas refers to the standard, most central type of efficient causation, which was discussed above, as "*per se*" efficient causation. Aquinas writes that a *per se* cause "produces its effect through the power of its nature or form, thus it follows that the effect is in itself intended by the cause."[32] In *per se* efficient causation, the efficient cause acts through its form to induce a form like its own in its patient. The effect it produces is described by Aquinas as "intended" because a *per se* cause has a tendency toward producing its effect. *Intendere* means to tend toward in Latin. A standard example of *per se* efficient causation is fire, which heats something. As we saw above, on account of the self-diffusivity of goodness, hot things are ordered toward making other things hot. Experience of the world reveals, however, that efficient causes sometimes produce unexpected effects, which bear no resemblance to the form by which they act. Aquinas recognized this and, following Aristotle, refers to such causes as *per accidens* causes. He writes that a cause is "called a *per accidens* cause of an effect because that effect which follows is outside of the intention of such a cause."[33] We saw earlier that a patient receives the action of an agent through its matter, which is already actualized in different ways through various forms. The forms that the patient already possesses impact the final effect that is produced through the agent's causality. Thus, an agent may, for this reason, produce an effect other than the one toward which it tends. Aquinas gives an example. He says that fire can sometimes cool a substance

[32] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 85, art. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 7, 115): secundum virtutem suae naturae vel formae producit effectum: unde sequitur quod effectus sit per se intentus a causa.

[33] *De pot.* qu. 3, art. 6 ad 6: dicitur causa eius per accidens, quia praeter intentionem ille effectus a tali causa sequitur. See also *In I Sent.* dist. 46, qu. 1, art. 2 ad 3.

if, through heating, the substance's pores are opened and an inner heat is lost.[34] Fire has no active power for cooling (i.e. the form of coolness does not inhere in it,) and thus it has no inclination toward cooling. Yet, the fire nevertheless causes coolness by its action because of how its causality is received in the patient.

It is important to note that *per accidens* causation derives its efficacy from *per se* causation. Aquinas writes that: "*Per se* causes are prior to *per accidens* causes."[35] Agents cause their *per accidens* effects in virtue of causing a prior effect according to *per se* causation. For example, the fire that cools a substance by opening its pores causes the cooling in virtue of causing heating.

4.2 Perfecting, Preparing, Advising, and Assisting (Instrumental) Causes

Aquinas realized that efficient causes do not operate in a vacuum. Efficient causes often influence one another's exercise of causality in various ways. Accordingly, the *per se* effects of an efficient cause can often be attributed to other efficient causes as well insofar as the effect depends in different ways on those other causes for its being. To capture the different ways in which an effect can depend on different efficient causes, Aquinas adopts a division of types of efficient causes. Following Avicenna, he claims that there are four different types of efficient causes: perfecting, preparing, advising, and assisting.[36]

The nature of the first two causes can be illustrated with an example. Consider a person who builds a house. In addition to himself, the final effect of the house can be attributed to the people who did tasks such as cutting the boards and making the bricks out of which the house was constructed. The builder is the perfecting cause because he induces the form of the house in the materials. Aquinas writes: "The efficient cause which is said to be a perfecting cause is the one which causes the ultimate perfection of a thing."[37] The causes that prepared the materials so that they can take on the form of the house are the preparing or disposing causes of the house. Aquinas writes: "The disposing cause, however, does not induce

[34] *In IX Meta.* lec. 2, n. 1789.

[35] *Summa contra Gentiles*, Lib. 2, cap. 39 (ed. Marietti, 155, n. 1155): Causa per se prior est ea quae est per accidens. *ScG* III c. 10 (ed. Marietti, 12, 1937): Omnis autem causa per accidens reducitur ad causam per se. See also *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 75, art. 1.

[36] *In V Meta.* lec. 2, nn. 766–769 and *In II Phys.* lec. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 70, n. 5). For the reference to Avicenna, see *In V Meta.* lec. 2, n. 766.

[37] *In V Meta*. lec. 2 (ed. Marietti, 212, n. 766): Perficiens autem dicitur causa efficiens, quae ultimam rei perfectionem causat.

the final perfecting form, but rather only prepares the matter for that form."[38] Put otherwise, the preparing or disposing cause efficiently causes the potentiality for the final effect.[39]

An advisory cause is the cause that gives the perfecting cause its form and therefore its end or goal. In human affairs, an advising cause is the one who proposes a form to the human agent's intellect.[40] By proposing a form to the intellect, the advisor gives the advisee the goal for which they act. In the realm of nature, Aquinas claims that the agent that generates a natural substance is its advising cause.[41] By inducing a substance's substantial form, the generator causes the substance it generates to have certain ends and thus to act in a certain way. Thus, by generating a substance, the generator becomes an advising cause of the generated substance's future actions and effects.

Assisting, or instrumental, causes are causes that help another efficient cause, known as a principal cause, to reach its end. The principal cause determines the end for which the instrumental cause acts, but the instrumental cause operates toward the end through its own power and action.[42] For example, when a carpenter uses a saw to make a bed, the saw cuts through its sharpness for the sake of making a bed. The saw only acts toward this end of bed-making, however, insofar as it is moved by the carpenter.[43] The key difference between an instrumental cause and a principal cause is whether or not the end for which the cause acts belongs to the cause through itself.

Aquinas's taxonomy of different types of efficient causes teaches us that efficient causation is a varied phenomenon. This is to say that not all instances of efficient causation are exactly the same. For example, we saw earlier that in *per accidens* efficient causation, the efficient cause does not intend its effect, while in *per se* efficient causation, the cause does intend the effect. The common feature that all instances of efficient causation share is dependence of the effect on its cause for its being. The precise way in which the effect depends specifically on its efficient causes is in virtue of the efficient cause's exercise of an active power in action.

[38] *In V Meta*. lec. 2 (ed. Marietti, 212, n. 767): Disponens autem quod non inducit ultimam formam perfectivam, sed tantummodo praeparat materiam ad formam. See also *In II Phys.* lec. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 70, n. 5).

[39] *In V Meta*. lec. 2.

[40] *In II Phys.* lec. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 70, n. 5).

[41] *In II Phys.* lec. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 70, n. 5).

[42] For a more detailed discussion of instrumental causality, see my *Aquinas on Efficient Causation and Causal Powers*, ch. 8.

[43] Aquinas does not think cognition is necessary for a principal cause to employ another as an instrument. He gives various examples of the principal–instrumental relationship in natural causes. See, for instance, *De pot.* qu. 3, art. 11 ad 5, where he discusses semen as an instrument of the male in the act of generation, and *In II de anima* lec. 8, where he discusses how the nutritive power uses fire as an instrument in generation.

5 Comparing Aquinas's Views with Competing Accounts of Causation

As we saw earlier, there are many details involved in Aquinas's approach to causation. In this final section, we will see how Aquinas's views differ from two prominent competing approaches to causation. Comparison of Aquinas's views with these competing accounts helps to highlight the philosophical significance of his position.

The historical philosopher who has most influenced contemporary assumptions about causation is the British empiricist David Hume (1711–1776).[44] As an empiricist, Hume believes that we are only warranted in positing features of the world that are observed through sense experience. When we experience the events that we typically judge as instances of causation, all we experience through our senses is one event happening first and the other following it. For example, when fire burns cotton, all that we see is fire coming into contact with the cotton and the cotton becoming ash. We do not see fire's power or fire's production of cotton's burning. Accordingly, Humeans conclude that we are not justified in positing power and production as real features of the world since we cannot observe them with our senses. Given that Humeans deny that causes exercise powers and produce their effects, they conceive of events as metaphysically separate and discrete. For instance, the event of fire's coming into contact with cotton bears no ontological connection with the event of the cotton's burning. Humeans think that our minds project a connection between these events because they regularly happen in conjunction with one another. On the Humean model, causation is merely a logical relationship between events that regularly happen in conjunction. Put otherwise, when we assert that one event is the cause of another event, what that amounts to in reality is only that the second event regularly follows the first event.[45]

The differences between Aquinas's model of causation and the Humean model are quite apparent. On Aquinas's view, efficient causation is a real,

[44] Scholars debate interpretations of Hume's own views on causation. My purpose is not to defend a particular interpretation of Hume but rather to introduce key theses often attributed to him. For an introduction to Hume's views, see Barry Stroud, *Hume* (New York: Routledge, 1977).

[45] Some contemporary philosophers accept Hume's central theses that there is no power or production in the world and that causation is a logical relationship between events. Yet, they deny that the logical relationship between cause events and effect events is constant conjunction, i.e. regularity. For instance, according to David Lewis's counterfactual analysis of causation: One event *e* causally depends on another event *c* if and only if, if *c* were not to occur, *e* would not occur. See David Lewis, "Causation," *Journal of Philosophy* 70:17 (1973): 556–567. The counterfactual account of causation is similar to the regularity account insofar as it reduces causation to a noncausal relationship between events.

irreducible metaphysical phenomenon. Efficient causes produce their effects and their effects really depend on their causes for their being. Like Hume, Aquinas recognizes that we do not have any sense experience of power and production. Yet, he notes that nevertheless we are justified through intellectual reasoning in positing the reality of power and production.[46] According to Aquinas, we do experience through sensation that substances undergo motions. For Aquinas, what it is for a substance to be in motion is for its potentiality to be actualized. For example, in the motion of heating, lukewarm water's potentiality for heat is actualized. Aquinas reasons that no substance can actualize its own potentiality. This is because a substance must already possess a form in actuality to actualize a potentiality for that form. However, if a substance is in potentiality with respect to a form, this implies that it does not have that form in actuality. So, the same substance cannot be both an agent and a patient with respect to the same form.[47] For example, when water is potentially hot, this implies that it does not have heat in actuality. However, to actualize a potentiality for heat, the water must already be hot. Thus, the water cannot be both in potentiality to heat and an agent capable of actualizing heat. Since we experience motion with our senses and we can reason that nothing in potentiality can actualize itself, Aquinas thinks that we can infer that whenever we observe motion, it was initiated by a distinct substance's causality. Aquinas writes: "that which reason apprehends about motion . . . implies the notion of cause and effect, for it is not the case that something is reduced from potency to act except by some agent cause."[48] For instance,

[46] *In VI Meta*. lec. 1 (ed. Marietti, 295, n. 1146): Cognitiones . . . quae sunt sensitivae tantum non sunt per principia et causas . . . Discurrere enim a causis in causata, vel e contrario, non est sensus, sed solum intellectus.

[47] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 2, art. 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 4, 31): Omne autem quod movetur, ab alio movetur. Nihil enim movetur, nisi secundum quod est in potentia ad illud ad quod movetur: movet autem aliquid secundum quod est actu. Movere enim nihil aliud est quam educere aliquid de potentia in actum: de potentia autem non potest aliquid reduci in actum, nisi per aliquod ens in actu, sicut calidum in actu, ut ignis, facit lignum, quod est calidum in potentia, esse actu calidum, et per hoc movet et alterat ipsum. Non autem est possibile ut idem sit simul in actu et potentia secundum idem, sed solum secundum diversa, quod enim est calidum in actu, non potest simul esse calidum in potentia, sed est simul frigidum in potentia. Impossibile est ergo quod, secundum idem et eodem modo, aliquid sit movens et motum, vel quod moveat seipsum. Omne ergo quod movetur, oportet ab alio moveri.

[48] *In III Phys*. lec. 5 (ed. Leon., vol. 2, 115): id quod ratio apprehendit circa motum . . . implicatur ratio causae et effectus: nam reduci aliquid de potentia in actum, non est nisi ab aliqua causa agente. See also *De prin. nat.* 3 (ed. Leon., vol. 43, 42): Quod enim est in potentia, non potest se reducere ad actum: sicut cuprum quod est potentia idolum, non facit se idolum, sed indiget operante, qui formam idoli extrahat de potentia in actum. Forma etiam non extraheret se de potentia in actum . . . Oportet ergo praeter materiam et formam esse aliquod principium quod agat, et hoc dicitur esse efficiens, vel movens, vel agens.

when we observe that cotton is burning, we can reason to the conclusion that something else was the agent cause of the burning. Since cotton's potential for burning cannot actualize itself, there must be agents with active powers that truly bring about changes in the world.

Let us now consider how Aquinas's approach to causation compares with another prominent model for understanding causation.

One shortcoming of the Humean model examined earlier is that it offers no explanation for why certain events regularly happen in conjunction with one another. For example, the Humean model claims it is simply a brute fact that the event of burning regularly happens in conjunction with the event of fire touching cotton. No explanation is offered for why these events universally happen in conjunction. The nomic model, however, seeks to explain why certain events universally happen in conjunction. The nomic model asserts that there are laws about necessary relationships between events and these laws are instantiated in particular instances of causation.[49] For example, there is a certain necessary relationship between fire's contact with a flammable substance and its burning. The law "Fire burns flammable substances" states this relationship. When a piece of cotton comes into contact with an instance of fire, the law determines that it burns. Laws of nature do not merely report the regularities that happen in the world. Rather, they necessitate or produce the regularities. A law of nature is what accounts for why two particulars are related to each other as cause and effect. In the early modern period, philosophers routinely held that God established the laws of nature.[50] In contemporary philosophy, however, laws of nature are seen as brute features of the universe.

Aquinas agrees with the nomic model that there is a deeper metaphysical explanation for the regularities in nature. Furthermore, he agrees that we can formulate universal generalizations about what effects will follow from causes, assuming that the causes are not impeded. Yet, there are crucial differences between Aquinas's views and the nomic model. On the nomic model, there is nothing within the intrinsic constitution of particular entities within the universe that determines why they behave according to certain regular patterns. The laws of nature are extrinsically imposed on particular entities and these extrinsic laws determine that entities of the same universal types behave according to certain regularities. In contrast,

[49] For an important contemporary account of laws of nature, see D. M. Armstrong, *What Is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

[50] On Descartes's view of laws of nature as established by the divine will, see Walter Ott, *Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 51–60.

Aquinas thinks that the similar behavior patterns of entities of the same type arises from their similar causal powers. The laws of nature do not determine why things of the same type act in similar ways. Rather, the laws of nature merely express the regularities that arise from the intrinsic causal powers of material substances. For example, on the nomic model the law "fire burns flammable substances" determines that a particular instance of fire burns a particular instance of cotton. On Aquinas's model, however, it is the intrinsic active and passive powers of fire and cotton that determine that fire regularly burns cotton and it is in virtue of the real powers of these material substances that the generalization "fire burns cotton" is true. Put otherwise, the nomic model assumes that laws exercise "top-down" control over natural events, while Aquinas believes that the powers of natural entities determine from the "bottom up" which laws obtain.

Aquinas's approach to causality offers some distinct benefits when compared with these two rival accounts. First, Aquinas offers a more robust and intuitive explanation of regularities in the material world. The Humean model asserts that the regular connection between certain events in nature, for example fire coming into contact with cotton and burning, is merely a brute fact. There is no explanation for why certain events are connected as cause and effect. Nomicism, on the other hand, postulates laws of nature to explain why certain events are connected. Yet, the laws of nature are themselves without explanation. Theists trace them to an arbitrary choice of the divine will, while non-theists claim they are brute facts. Aquinas, however, offers a more satisfying explanation for why certain effects are routinely connected to certain causes. Since substances of the same type have causal powers of the same type, they produce similar effects when in similar circumstances. Generalizations, such as fire burns cotton, are rooted in the active and passive powers of material substances. The real features of things in the world explain why certain regularities obtain and certain natural laws are true.

Aquinas's view that regularities are rooted in the powers of material substances leads to a second related advantage of his account. His approach to causation suggests a more intuitive and plausible conception of the project of natural science. On Humeanism, the project of natural science turns out to be about uncovering which arbitrary connections obtain between types of events in the world. Natural science increases our understanding of brute matters of fact. Similarly, on nomicism, natural science is about uncovering what abstract laws of nature happen to obtain. On Aquinas's view, by contrast, the project of natural science is to come to a deeper understanding of the powers of observable material substances.

The object of natural science is not regularities or abstract laws. Rather, it is the real features of material substances. This view of natural science fits better with how scientists, and even ordinary people, conceive of what they are doing when they seek to understand the material world.

6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen the key elements of Aquinas's approach to causation. We saw the advantages of Aquinas's approach when compared with its contemporary rivals. Aquinas offers a more satisfying account of why certain regularities obtain in nature and a more intuitive conception of scientific inquiry. Aquinas roots regularities in the powers of material substances and science is about understanding the real features of material entities. Because of these advantages, power theories of causation have made a comeback in contemporary philosophy.[51] Yet, many questions remain about what powers are and how they are involved in causation. Aquinas's theories offer a fruitful model for how to develop a powers-based theory of causation.

Aquinas's understanding of the causal powers of material substances is inextricably bound up with his hylomorphism. Material substances have active powers in virtue of their forms and passive powers in virtue of their matter. The intrinsic fit between form as that which perfects and matter as that which can be perfected accounts for why the powers of distinct substances fit together in such a way that substances are able to act upon and react to one another. While hylomorphism is an Aristotelian theory, Aquinas draws on an important principle from the neo-Platonic tradition to explain why forms are principles of activity. As principles of actuality, forms are good; and goodness as such is self-diffusive. Aquinas's neo-Platonic conception of goodness and perfection offers a metaphysical reason for why forms do not merely characterize their bearers but also dispose them toward causal activity.

Aquinas's conception of active power as a self-diffusive form also offers an explanation for why every active power is inclined toward a specific type of action as its end or goal. On Aquinas's view, active powers do not enable a generic sort of causal influencing. Rather, each active power inclines toward a determinate result because as goods they are self-diffusive. For instance, a particular power is inclined toward heating because that power

[51] For an overview of contemporary work on causal powers, see Jonathan Jacobs (ed.), *Causal Powers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

is itself a form of heat. Aquinas's account of the order between a power and the act toward which it is directed suggests an intriguing way of making sense of how natural beings can be ordered to goals given that they lack cognition. In Aquinas's view, self-diffusiveness is simply a part of the nature of the good. By sharing in this nature, any being, whether it is cognitive or not, tends toward a goal, namely communicating its own way of being to another.[52]

[52] I am grateful to Gaven Kerr for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.

CHAPTER 2

A Metametaphysics of Form

James Dominic Rooney

Metametaphysical reflection is nothing new. Avant la lettre, Aristotle's attempt to lay out a science of "being *qua* being" and its first principles – the scientific discipline that came to be called "metaphysics" – involved an attempt to justify his methodology as well as to develop responses to skeptics. Contemporary metametaphysics has revived some of these discussions. Whereas all metaphysicians roughly agree on the sorts of problems that count as "metaphysics," and generically that the subject matter concerns the nature and structure of reality, not all metaphysicians agree about what constitutes the form of an answer to such problems. Some contemporary metaphysicians focus on existence questions – listing *what exists* – whereas others focus on "grounding" or dependence relations of some kind – what *depends on* what or is *fundamental*. These differences tend to appear in responses to skeptical challenges to metaphysics.

Skeptical challenges can give principled reasons to prefer one approach to metaphysics as opposed to another. Jonathan Schaffer, for example, argues that the triviality of responses to existence questions gives us reason to accept a conception of metaphysical reflection as aiming to provide accounts of the grounding or dependence relations that undergird what is fundamental. It is not difficult to see that there are or exist numbers between 5 and 10 and, thus, that *there are numbers*. What is difficult is saying whether numbers are fundamental entities – for example, grounded in some extramental structure of reality – or merely conventional.[1]

In this chapter, I will begin by arguing that approaches to metaphysics which center on modal intuitions open themselves up to unnecessary skeptical challenges. E. J. Lowe and Tuomas Tahko are exemplars by which I will illustrate this problem. Lowe and Tahko take a core element of metaphysics to rest upon knowledge of possible essences, which allows

[1] Jonathan Schaffer, "On What Grounds What," in *Metametaphysics*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 348–349.

us to reflect upon possible beings and their kinds. While skepticism about modal knowledge might be a kind of global skepticism, these claims about metaphysics resting on modal knowledge are dialectically ineffective with scientific anti-realists of various stripes, and skeptics might justifiably appeal to such anti-realism to question whether claims about modality constitute knowledge or are a substantive kind of knowledge.

Modal intuitions are not as necessary for metaphysics as Lowe, Tahko, and skeptical interlocutors believe. Metaphysics can be much more ably defended against skeptical challenges if it rests simply on knowledge of what is actual, not what is possible. "Putting actuality first" is a motto that aptly describes the scholastic metametaphysics I will propose, showing that it avoids the accusations of non-naturalism as well as the skeptical challenges, as scholastics build their house not on modal facts but on *form*. In fact, I will propose that the cornerstone of scholastic metametaphysics is the core insight behind Rudolf Carnap's well-known skepticism about metaphysics.

1 A Defense of the Possibility of Metaphysics

There are well-known criticisms that metaphysics is an impossible enterprise. Bas van Fraassen has criticized analytic metaphysics as involving problematic methodology that overly relies on a priori intuitions, where these intuitions apply not to reality but only to their own logical constructions (or "postulations"). Metaphysicians therefore are involved not in a scientific study of entities that exist in the real world but in the "development of a detailed, intricate understanding of simulacra under the same names" as those entities.[2] While many have disputed whether and to what extent metaphysics involves a priori knowledge or intuitions, the key point of van Fraassen's criticisms largely rest on epistemological considerations (which he defends as part of his attack on forms of scientific realism): We should withhold belief in anything going "beyond the actual, observable phenomena, and [so] to recognize no objective modality in nature."[3] Specifically, then, van Fraassen argues that one cannot have objective knowledge of modal truths; instead, what we can know are objective, nonmodal facts about what is observable.[4] Van Fraassen's objections to metaphysics are largely *epistemological*. They

[2] Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 4.
[3] Bas van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 202.
[4] Bradley Monton and Bas C. van Fraassen, "Constructive Empiricism and Modal Nominalism," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 54:3 (September 2003): 405–422, esp. 416.

thus bear some resemblance to views popularly attributed to Kant (leaving aside scholarly questions regarding whether this accurately represents Kantianism) that knowledge of what things are like "in themselves" – in this case, knowledge of essential differences, necessities, or possibilities – is impossible or unnecessary.

Several metaphysicians agree with van Fraassen that analytic metaphysics rests on objective claims about modal knowledge. Lowe and Tahko defend the possibility of metaphysics precisely on modal grounds. In short, they each argue that modal knowledge makes metaphysics possible but also necessary. As Lowe puts it, "experience alone cannot determine what is actual, in the absence of a metaphysical delimitation of the possible."[5] Those who hold that scientific knowledge can do without metaphysics, Lowe argues, fail to notice that "empirical science is dependent upon metaphysics" because science involves "assumptions which go beyond anything that science itself can legitimate."[6] Lowe means that science alone, independent of metaphysical assumptions, cannot reveal facts about what is possibly the case, and so cannot determine what kinds of things are actual either. For Lowe, making any existence claims about the world requires modal knowledge of what is possible. Metaphysics aims to clarify our modal knowledge, and this clarification or reflection upon modal knowledge is not accomplished by any other discipline.

Lowe seems to reason thus: To judge that anything is actual, we must know facts about what is possible from which to delimit them. Facts about possibility are not derived from experience but are a priori. Hence, we must know a priori facts in order to judge that anything is actual. What is known as a priori is only known in a confused way; employing a priori intuitions without clarification will result in misjudging what is actual. For that reason, clarifying a priori intuitions is necessary to avoid misjudging what is actual. Since we cannot know what is actual without knowing facts about modality, clarity about those facts is a prerequisite for making judgments about anything else. Metaphysics provides that clarity.

To be clear, Lowe understands metaphysics to have as its subject not modality itself but clarifying modal intuitions as they pertain to *existence*. Metaphysicians are concerned not with the compossibility of a set of propositions (i.e. not entailing a contradiction) but with whether a state of affairs of a given type can obtain or certain entities possibly exist.[7] That is to say that the goal of metaphysics is to list the kinds of entities that exist

[5] E. J. Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 9.
[6] Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, 5. [7] Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, 10.

and justify this list of "ontological categories." Since these kinds of categories concern what kinds of things possibly are actual, simply speaking, these categories need to be both (1) *essential* to whatever exists (nothing exists that does not fit under such categories) and (2) the *ultimate* or *most general* or *fundamental* essential divisions of reality that range across entities just in virtue of existing.[8] Lowe thinks that there is no a priori knowledge which of these categories obtain. Instead, a priori knowledge of modality consists in knowing the possible essences of things (essences being a "special kind of proposition," a real definition of what a thing is or could be, rather than "a special kind of entity").[9] Lowe therefore insists that metaphysicians require reflection on experience, and particularly the results of natural science, in order to discover which ontological categories are actual, since we do not have a priori knowledge that any such categories are metaphysically necessary.[10]

Tahko has defended Lowe's overall outlook without buying into the specific views Lowe had regarding modal epistemology. Tahko is sympathetic to an approach closer to what is called "naturalized" metaphysics, on which metaphysics does not rely on anything like a priori knowledge of essences but works out the structural (read: modal) commitments of scientific theories. He even questions whether there is any serious distinction between the purported a priori methodology of analytic metaphysics as opposed to the purportedly a posteriori methodology characterizing naturalized metaphysics.[11] In the end, however, Tahko's response helpfully points out that, if the skepticism about metaphysics consists merely in skepticism about modal knowledge, the criticisms of metaphysics would not be very serious. Everyone has problems explaining modal epistemology! But Tahko insists, like Lowe, that modal knowledge remains central to metaphysics.

The fundamental problem for both Lowe and Tahko is that we could not do scientific reasoning, and make judgments about what is actual, without criteria for the identity (and persistence, etc.) of things.[12] Tahko even goes beyond Lowe in arguing that we need to have modal knowledge not only of what things might exist but specifically "which object a given

[8] Lowe, *The Possibility of Metaphysics*, 11–21.

[9] E. J. Lowe, "What Is the Source of Our Knowledge of Modal Truths?" *Mind* 121 (2012): 919–950.

[10] Lowe, *Possibility of Metaphysics*, 23–25.

[11] Tuomas Tahko, "A Priori and A Posteriori," in *The Routledge Handbook of Metametaphysics*, ed. Ricki Bliss and J. T. M. Miller (London: Routledge, 2020), 353–363. See also Tuomas Tahko, "In Defence of Aristotelian Metaphysics," in *Contemporary Aristotelian Metaphysics*, ed. Thomas Tahko (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 26–43.

[12] Compare Tahko, "A Priori and A Posteriori," 28–57.

set of conditions is associated with."[13] For instance, imagine we see an object that is red – how do we discover whether redness is essential to that object? One way is to see if that object can persist despite being not red, or if there are any non-red instances of the kind. Both "tests" would require us to know what the conditions of the persistence or identity of that object are; we must know *modal* facts about the *kind* of thing it is. Tahko believes this shows us that modal knowledge is required to make judgments about what is actual. Scientific work is needed to clarify which ontological categories obtain. Nevertheless, scientific data is uninterpretable except in light of modal intuitions. We need already to be able to apply "object" and "essence" and relevant modal notions before we can conclude, for example, that the scientific evidence supports the existence of the Higgs boson.[14] "The a priori work required . . . does not concern an analysis of the *concepts* of 'mass' and 'energy,' but rather the *natures* of mass and energy."[15] So, in the end, Tahko agrees with Lowe. We must know a priori at least some fundamental truths about metaphysical modality because we would be unable to make judgments as to what is actual without. That is, objective knowledge of metaphysical modality is a prerequisite to judging what is actual.

2 A More Serious Challenge to the Possibility of Metaphysics

Lowe proposes metaphysics is an "*a priori* discipline concerned with revealing, through rational reflection and argument, the essences of entities, both actual and possible, with a view to articulating the fundamental structure of reality as a whole."[16] Metaphysics requires, therefore, that we have some way to discover "objective or real possibility, at least some grasp of which is an indispensable prerequisite for the acquisition of any empirical knowledge of actuality."[17] But Lowe and Tahko miss the fact that the critics, including van Fraassen, are not attacking the very possibility of modal truth, or even that judgments about what is actual would require such modal knowledge. Critics propose that modal knowledge is not *objective* or that we can know what is actual in various ways without knowing what is *possible*/*necessary*.

[13] Tuomas Tahko, "Metaphysics as the First Philosophy," in *Aristotle on Method and Metaphysics*, ed. Edward Feser (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 60.
[14] Tahko, "Metaphysics as the First Philosophy," 62–64.
[15] Tahko, "In Defence of Aristotelian Metaphysics," 41.
[16] E. J. Lowe, "The Rationality of Metaphysics," *Synthese* 178 (2011): 99–109, 100.
[17] Lowe, "The Rationality of Metaphysics."

Van Fraassen fundamentally agrees with Lowe that we could not judge whether the entities posited in scientific contexts "really exist" or are "objectively" actual if we lacked objective modal knowledge. We can know what is true or exists within many context-sensitive domains without the further claim that we know what *really* or *essentially* or *objectively* is true or exists, "true" or "exists" thus extending across all contexts and domains. Van Fraassen merely takes a *modus tollens* to Lowe's *modus ponens*, arguing that scientific investigation "get on" without the view that scientific investigation concerns the *essences* of things, as opposed to facts about what is observable, and therefore that Lowe is wrong in his assumption that scientific investigation arrives at truths that involve essential or objective modal claims. Tahko and Lowe's view of metaphysics might correspondingly rely on a commitment to scientific realism, and so is dialectically effective against those committed to realism. Since someone like van Fraassen does not accept these views, they need some other way to argue that we have objective modal knowledge sufficient for metaphysics. Their appeal to a priori knowledge might be necessary since they have ruled out experience alone as a source of this knowledge. If we necessarily employ objective modal knowledge about essence to make judgments about what exists or is true, then experience alone without such knowledge cannot supply it, and objective modal knowledge is necessarily only a priori.

Not only does principled dependence of metaphysics on a priori objective modal knowledge seem unnecessary, but it might even open us to more profound forms of metaphysical skepticism than those posed by van Fraassen. Many species of contemporary skeptics are inspired by Rudolf Carnap's criticisms of metaphysics, alleging semantic problems for metaphysics. These skeptics argue, broadly, that no good sense can be given to "objective" claims of any kind and are often error theorists about any such claims to, for example, unrestricted quantification, objective modality claims, and so forth.[18] There are attempts to respond non-dismissively to

[18] See Amie Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), esp. 39–40; Eli Hirsch, "Physical-Object Ontology, Verbal Disputes, and Common Sense," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 70:1 (January 2005): 67–97 and "Quantifier Variance and Realism," *Philosophical Issues* 12 (2002): 51–72; David Chalmers, "Ontological Anti-Realism," in *Metametaphysics*, ed. David Chalmers, David Manley, and Ryan Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 77–130 and *Constructing the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 103–104; Jan Westerhoff, *Ontological Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 281–282, 291 and "An Argument for Ontological Nihilism," *Inquiry* 67 (2021): 513–559, esp. 523.

these problems.[19] It is plausible, however, that other responses are susceptible to structurally similar dilemmas to the approach of Lowe and Tahko.[20]

3 Carnap's Insight into Existence

A metaphysician might respond by giving a (dismissive) response that treats such skeptical arguments as presupposing a need for infallible epistemic access. One might reason as follows.

The skeptics are right that we cannot "get behind" our concepts or faculties to evaluate them epistemically without appeal to other epistemic faculties. It is therefore true that we can have no infallible knowledge of modality or quantification, and that all our knowledge is fallible ... but who cares? These skeptical arguments have not shown us that we fail to have knowledge of what exists or of modality, unless knowledge requires that we know that we know. But that is a contentious assumption we can simply deny. Further, while we might not have knockdown reasons to convince the skeptic our knowledge of modality is objective (i.e. *infallible* or indubitable evidence), we can give *fallible* evidence, such as track-record arguments. As scientific realists argue, our progress in science would involve an apparent miracle if our modal beliefs were not objectively accurate. Consequently, metaphysicians should just ignore these skeptics and work ahead on the hypothesis that our knowledge is objective, and thus provide evidence that the skeptics are wrong.[21]

An epistemic response fails to engage the skeptic since, if knowledge of modality (of what was possible) was logically prior to engaging in judgments of what is actual, it would be in principle *impossible* to give this epistemological response. The skeptic does not allege that we need infallible evidence that we know our modal knowledge is objective. Rather, the point is that we cannot even coherently judge that our knowledge is objective, or that it can be known not to be objective. What the skeptic alleges is not simply that we cannot *know* objective facts but that the semantic facts entail that our judgments are not objective, either (allegedly) because of some fact essential to semantics generally or because the concept of "objectivity," or the operations involved in unrestricted quantification,

[19] For example, Theodore Sider, *Writing the Book of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[20] See Javier Cumpa, "The Regress Argument against Realism about Structure," *Inquiry* 66 (2023): 726–737; Nicholas Stang, "How Is Metaphysics Possible," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 123 (2023): 231–252.

[21] For an instance of such a response, see Michael Rea, "Realism in Theology and Metaphysics," in *Essays in Analytic Theology: Volume 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 32–33.

entail contradictions. Appeal to track-record arguments, for instance, would be unhelpful. We could not have fallible evidence that confirms a hypothesis that our knowledge is objective if it were impossible to coherently state the hypothesis or if we knew a priori that the hypothesis was necessarily false. That is what the skeptics allege.[22]

To motivate a distinct potential metametaphysics that is an alternative to that proposed by Lowe/Tahko, I will first try to distill the objection. Carnap is widely thought to have alleged something like a *logical* contradiction in the enterprise of metaphysics. As Carnap inspired many modern skeptics, my focus on Carnap alone hopefully has prima facie plausibility as representing the spirit of metaphysical skepticism. Carnap famously drew a distinction between internal and external questions:

> If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic *framework* for the new entities in question. And now we must distinguish two kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities of the new kind *within the framework*; we call them *internal* questions; and second, questions concerning the existence or reality *of the framework itself*, called *external* questions.[23]

The concept of "reality" referred to when asking internal questions "is an empirical, scientific, non-metaphysical concept. To recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the framework of things at a particular space-time position so that it fits together with the other things recognized as real, according to the rules of the framework."[24] Carnap alleges that external questions are problematic. There are certain frameworks, for example, which refer to "things" or "objects," and Carnap cannot make sense of a way to formulate what it would mean to call into question the reality of "thing worlds": "the thesis of the reality of the thing world cannot be among these statements [within the framework], because it cannot be formulated in the thing language or, it seems, in any other theoretical language."[25]

Carnap concludes that such questions can only be given sense as a question of a largely pragmatic choice to prefer one framework over another, for reasons independent of frameworks, including the way in which one framework might be more efficient in dealing with certain

[22] See, e.g., the metasemantic argument in Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, 95.
[23] Rudolf Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4:11 (January 1950): 21–22.
[24] Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," 22.
[25] Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," 23.

problems, or the way in which such frameworks cohere better with other theoretical knowledge. "However, it would wrong to describe this situation by saying: 'The fact of efficiency of the thing language is confirming evidence for the reality of the thing world'; we should rather say instead: 'This fact makes it advisable to accept the thing language.'"[26] Once one accepts a given framework, there are no substantive questions about what entities exist internal to the framework, since "the answers are found, not by empirical investigation based on observations, but by logical analysis based on the rules for the new expressions."[27]

Carnap's argumentation is implicit, and interpretation controversial, but the argumentation might be made explicit as follows based on facts about semantics, which represents broadly the spirit of both species of contemporary metaphysical skepticism. Carnap thought that his argument, if successful, would show that internal "ontological" questions are analytic and trivial (following simply from the rules of the framework and its expressions). While some skeptics today defend this position in modified form,[28] I will contend that Carnap's core contention does not depend on a view of analyticity (which was criticized later).[29] Let us focus simply on quantifiers and other logical operators as an example by which to reconstruct a similar argument. Logical operators, such as the quantifiers, are functionally defined within a given framework of logical operators. Often operators and general structural terms are inter-definable. Further, we could have chosen distinct terms or operators to go about our business. Perhaps we can show that categorization in general is a contingent enterprise: We can show there are always multiple, truth-equivalent ways of categorizing the world, as in the case it is possible to engage in "conceptual engineering," for example, and reshape our ontological categorization; or in translation (à la Hirsch) between distinct truth-equivalent schemes by which to categorize entities.[30] Which way we select to categorize the world seems a pragmatic question.

More fundamentally, there seems to be a problem involved in attempting to call into question whether any given framework is *real*. Evaluating

[26] Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," 24.
[27] Carnap, "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology," 24.
[28] Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, esp. 36–40, 93–94.
[29] Hannes Leitgeb and André Carus, "Rudolf Carnap," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (summer 2023 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/carnap/carnap-quine.html, Supplement "Carnap versus Quine on the Analytic–Synthetic Distinction."
[30] Herman Cappelen, *Fixing Language: Conceptual Engineering and the Limits of Revision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

whether that framework itself is "real" in some relevant sense requires semantic ascent to a distinct metalanguage from which we evaluate the framework, expressed in an object-language. Aiming to construct some truth evaluation within the object-language itself – that is, have the truth predicates of a language within that language itself (as Tarski showed) – would generate a contradiction.[31] These facts therefore seem to preclude the possibility of anything like absolutely unrestricted quantification, which seems to be that upon which metaphysics depends. (A similar objection can be reformulated in terms of explanatory success.)[32]

What the skeptic thus aims to show us, on my reconstruction of Carnapian insights, is that there are no ontological categories in the sense that Lowe/Tahko mean. If there are some senses in which there are such divisions of ways things "exist," those ontological categories do not correspond or refer to anything that is like a *natural kind* of existing; that is, a kind whose membership is essential to its members.[33] Those categories are, it is alleged, necessarily not "modally robust" or "objective" because existence does not come in different varieties. Asserting that something exists is simply to assert that it falls under a sortal of some kind or populates a domain, or something of this sort.[34] Thomasson reasons similarly in criticizing the notion of "carving at the joints" of reality:

> logic is topic-neutral, then its topic is not the structure of the world; unlike the terminology of biology, political science, or physics, it is not attempting to map the structure of a particular part of reality. Once we have a formal/material distinction in hand, we can suggest a picture like this: some material predicates may be designed to carve the world at (certain of its) joints, to map a certain structure – for example, a structure of the world into biological or physical natural kinds. But the distinctive feature of logical terms is that they may apply to material terms of any kind, indifferent to the distinctions among the objects and properties described, or the domains discussed.[35]

[31] J. C. Beall, Michael Glanzberg, and David Ripley, "Liar Paradox," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (fall 2020 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/liar-paradox, 4.3.1.

[32] For two flavors, see Otávio Bueno, "Dispensing with Facts, Substances, and Structures," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 60:1 (January 2023): 49–61; Stang, "How Is Metaphysics Possible," 13: "the explanatory success of a metaphysical theory ... depends upon the language in which it is formulated."

[33] The argument for ontological anti-realism is thus like arguments against natural-kind realism in other domains; cf. Anjan Chakravartty, "Last Chance Saloons for Natural Kind Realism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 60:1 (January 2023): 63–81.

[34] See, e.g., Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, 82–89.

[35] Thomasson, *Ontology Made Easy*, 312.

4 The Metametaphysics of Form

The Carnapian analysis of existence needs a counterpoint. My proposal involves presenting a scholastic approach to "existence" and "being." Scholastics such as Cajetan, John of St. Thomas, Capreolus, and Domingo Banez developed and defended an account of existence that, I propose, might circumvent the skeptical worries and constitute a more naturalistic approach to metaphysics. In what follows, I will largely abstract from history to present chief facets of consensus on these matters from the scholastics, which we might use to construct a general theory of existence and show the way in which this corresponds to or differs from contemporary views. For my purposes here, the historical details are secondary to presenting a theory of existence and a justification of the possibility of metaphysics that undermines the skeptical conclusions.

These scholastics begin with the "analogy of being" doctrine of Thomas Aquinas, derived from Aristotle. Aquinas claimed, following Aristotle, that "being" (*ens*) is predicated analogously of its instances.[36] John Duns Scotus argued in favor of rejecting this view by positing that, if "being" meant different things in different contexts, we could not reason about God from His created effects (for instance), as that would seem to involve equivocation in what it would *mean* to attribute anything to God as a subject of predication/judgment.[37] This is similar to contemporary arguments against distinct senses of the existential quantifier.

Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, a Renaissance Thomist, responded to Scotus's attacks by developing an account of the way in which existence and being are attributed analogously. In contrast to contemporary metaphysicians who advocate for distinct meanings of the existential quantifier (à la Meinong), the Thomists did not agree. They only wanted to affirm that "being" is cross-categorial. That is, it is just analytic that anything at all can be said to "exist" or be an "entity."[38] Cajetan therefore argued that what "being" *refers to* is not the same in each instance but agreed that there is one concept (or sense) for "being" (*ens*) that ranges over any categories or domains or other ways of classifying anything. This concept "being" is necessarily indeterminate or indistinct among the different ways that

[36] Thomas Aquinas, *Sententia libri Metaphysicae*, bk IV, nn. 534–543; cf. *Summa Theologiae* I qu. 13, art. 5.

[37] See, e.g., John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d. 3, pars. 1, q. 1–2, nn. 26–55; d. 8, pars. 1, q. 3, nn. 80–89. For a clear summary of the dispute, see Thomas Ward, *Ordered by Love* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2022), 26–38.

[38] Far from being sympathetic to contemporary "ways of being" talk, this framework is opposed to views like Kris McDaniel, *Fragmentation of Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

anything could exist, since it needs to be able to be applied to anything at all (he referred to it as a "confused" concept, but "indistinct" is a better translation).[39] Attributing "being" is then to *mean* the same thing in each instance, so there is no equivocation in inferences,[40] even though Cajetan notes that this concept can be clarified from an "imperfect" to a "perfect" concept through a posteriori discovery – that is, we discover what kinds of things fall under "being" (and so clarify the extension of the indeterminate concept) through empirical investigation.[41]

The scholastics generally held that attributing being or existence to anything involves two mental operations: being aware of X *and* judging that X exists, *simpliciter* (with a quantifier) or in some way (with a predicate). Cajetan proposes an epistemic story in virtue of which we can acquire this concept from our knowledge acquired only from sense experience, plus the capacities to attend to experience and to judge it.[42] On his account, the concept of "being" or "existence" is like the concept of "predication/judgment" generally. If we wanted to give a characterization of what it is to predicate one thing of another, we would depict it as "*F is x*" with variables, precisely to indicate that anything could be put in those places. Attributing "being" to something is not the same as that of "predication," however, as what it is for something to be some way or another has nothing to do with our concepts or judgments. To "exist" or be a "being" is not then merely to be a subject of attribution. The point can be gathered by noting that the scholastic view is surprisingly closely allied to a Fregean view of existence, as Peter van Inwagen understands it.

Van Inwagen notes that existence is something *like* a second-order predicate,[43] as it is like number, but that the numbers in question do not concern our concepts themselves; when we speak of there being zero horses (i.e. that there exist no horses), this is a judgment about *horses*, not about the concept "horse."[44] Cajetan similarly distinguishes that what "being" signifies or refers to is always *some* definite way that something exists

[39] Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas' "On Being and Essence,"* trans. L. Kenzierski and F. Wade (Marquette, WI: Marquette University Press, 1964, reprinted 2011), 42.

[40] Cajetan responds to Scotus's arguments about univocity explicitly in *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas' "On Being and Essence,"* 77–83.

[41] See Tommaso de Vio Cajetan, *The Analogy of Names, and the Concept of Being*, trans. Edward Bushinski (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1953), 80–83.

[42] Cajetan, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas' "On Being and Essence,"* 40–62.

[43] For scholastics, "being" is a first-order predicate but involves standing in a special relation – it is a determinable, like "having number" – discussed below.

[44] Compare Peter van Inwagen, *Existence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 3, esp. 61.

(the "objective concept" of "being," in Cajetan's terminology[45]), even though the sense of the concept by which we refer ("formal concept") is indeterminate to any way that anything is. Thus, to exist is not merely to be the satisfaction conditions of a predicate or the truth conditions of a proposition. Understanding predicates (and quantifiers) as simply referring to satisfaction conditions would likely generate a contradiction.[46] The *existence predicate* is like a truth predicate; it cannot be coherently characterized except by semantic ascent to a metalanguage. Similarly, existence cannot both be a (real) property and be such that it is a property logically prior to all properties or objects whatsoever (for that would be viciously circular). These considerations are exactly the basis for Cajetan's conclusion (following Aristotle) that "being" or "existence" is predicated analogously and that "being" is not a genus, some property or feature essential to and shared in common by all those things that exist.[47] Attributing existence is not then to attribute a specific first-order property to anything, just as falling under the scope of the concept "being" is not to possess some property common to all beings.

So, what *is* existence, on the scholastic model? The Thomistic view implies that "being" or "existence" is a kind of *determinable*. Determinables are "type-level properties that stand in a distinctive specification relation" and which have varying degrees of specification that are relative to the type. For example, "*color* is a determinable having *red*, *blue*, and other specific shades of color as determinates [and] *red* is a determinate of *color* and a determinable of *scarlet*."[48] Determination specification relations are not genus–species relations, since "in contrast with the disjunction-disjunct relation, where disjuncts may be dissimilar and compatible (as with *red or round*), determinates of a determinable (at a given level of specificity) are both similar and incompatible (*red* and *blue* are similar in both being colors; nothing can be simultaneously and uniformly both *red* and *blue*)."[49] In short, the scholastics think of "being" as a determinable that has indefinitely many determinates: ways of existing; that is, something that counts as "being" some way.[50]

[45] Cajetan, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas' "On Being and Essence,"* 67–71.

[46] Compare Marcin Tkaczyk, "Robert Trueman's Defence of Higher-Order Logic," *Logic and Logical Philosophy* (2023): http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/LLP.2023.006, esp. 4–5.

[47] Compare Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 998b23, 1059b31.

[48] Jessica Wilson, "Determinables and Determinates," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (spring 2023 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/determinate-determinables.

[49] Wilson, "Determinables and Determinates."

[50] See Capreolus, *In ST I*, d. 8, q. 1, a. 1, conc. 3; Cajetan, *De Ente et Essentia*, c. 5, q. 11 ad 8; Domingo Banez, *The Primacy of Existence in Thomas Aquinas* (*Scholastica Commentaria in Primam*

This scholastic account of existence entails that "being" is conceptually implicated in every instance we attribute anything of or to any subject; that is why "being" is the most primitive concept we have.[51] It is important, however, to specify that to predicate being is to predicate *actualities* of the subject. Cajetan does not think (like Aquinas) that any predicate or name refers to something that exists; there are names for things that do not exist, like phoenixes and goatstags. Yet, these scholastics do not hold that a proposition containing a non-referring term is meaningless but merely that it fails to attribute actuality to anything in virtue of failing to refer (Aquinas thus treats "blindness" as a property we can attribute truly but denies that it has existential import – blindness is not a property that refers to an actuality but a lack of it). Overall, none of this should be surprising, since it looks equivalent to a vision of truthmaking or at least that truth supervenes on being. Nevertheless, that is not quite correct.

It might be surprising that Aquinas and the Thomistic school hold predication itself generally involves attributing actuality. That is, they hold both that true predication of a subject does not necessarily carry existential import (not all terms in a true proposition necessarily refer) *and* that every predication, by reason of logical form, signifies being actual in some way.[52] This is not as mysterious as it seems and does not require a strong "correspondence" doctrine of truth.[53] The point is only to distinguish truth from reference. No proposition needs to refer to anything, although *being a true proposition* connotes a way that something is (and, in this case, it is *the proposition* that is actual in some way by being true). Thus, Aquinas thinks "truth" *connotes* "being."[54] Every true proposition, even if the terms contained in the proposition refer to nothing, connotes actuality merely in virtue of its form.

This last term is used in logic but latches on to an important medieval concept that clarifies this scholastic approach to metaphysics. "Form" is

Partam Angelici Doctoris ad Sexagesimam Quartem Quaestionem, 1584) (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery Co., 1966), 33–43; cf. Patrick Zoll, *What It Is to Exist* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), ch. 6.

[51] Cajetan, *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas' "On Being and Essence,"* 51–52.

[52] *Quaestiones Quodlibetales* XII, q. 1 ad 1; cf. *In I Sent.* 19.5.1 ad 1; *In III Sent.* 5; 7.1.1; *Summa Theologiae* I qu. 39, art. 6 ad 2; qu. 39, art. 5 ad 4; *De Potentia* q. 7, art. 2 ad 2.

[53] Aquinas's position on existence or truth alone does not seem to entail commitment to truthmaking, and there are contemporary examples that illustrate how these come apart: e.g., Treton Merricks defends realism about truth while rejecting a correspondence theory; *Truth and Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), ch. 8.

[54] For example, *De Veritate*, q. 1, art. 1.

a functional term within Aristotelian and medieval metaphysics: A "form" refers to some way of being actual or existing. Whatever it is in virtue of which something is actual is a form. This follows, we might notice, from the scholastic commitments that "being" is a determinable that implicitly includes all possible ways to be. Since "being" is a determinable, nothing that actually exists exemplifies *merely* existing in a generic way. Instead, everything that is actual is actual *in some way*. That gives us the idea of "form": Forms are simply whatever it is in virtue of which something counts as an instance of the determinable "being." That is, forms are whatever specify the determinates of being. A determinate might just *be* a form, as God or the angels are actualities. But many scholastics held a metaphysics on which material objects were not just identical with forms but that material objects *had* forms.[55] The scholastic view of "being" as a determinable ensures that "being" itself conceptually or a priori comes in no kinds, so these divisions of the kind of ways things could exist are not knowable without empirical investigation.

What differentiates the scholastic theory from Fregean theories of existence (in at least a popular form) is that any given form is essentially a way of being actual, but this does not specify whether any given form *necessarily exists*. Falling under a sortal or populating a domain, then, does not ipso facto entail existence. It is essential to every form that a form makes predications true, whether those truths are contingent or necessary. Nevertheless, being a form does not essentially involve being either essentially contingent or necessarily existent, as forms must be essentially such as to range over any possible kind of existence. (Thomas Aquinas, on this basis, argues for his well-known "real distinction" between essence and existence.)[56]

The scholastic metametaphysics clearly differs from the Lowe/Tahko and Siderian approach to metaphysics: It cannot be that our knowledge of what is actual could be logically prior to experience, since "being" is a determinable that necessarily has no specific content. "Being" is not a genus, the scholastics would insist, since the differentia of each species would themselves exemplify "being." The scholastics agree that the fundamental intuitions of the skeptical arguments of the Carnapian are

[55] See an extended defense of this analysis in James Dominic Rooney, *Material Objects in Confucian and Aristotelian Metaphysics* (New York: Bloomsburg Academic, 2022), 71–82.

[56] Since the scholastics held that angels are subsisting immaterial forms that do not essentially/necessarily exist (since they are created), whereas God does exist in that way, they had clear cases to make these distinctions evident. For background on these arguments, see Gaven Kerr, *Aquinas's Way to God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

essentially sound, but that these arguments merely show that "being" is not a genus or a class. The skeptics have not undermined metaphysics. An "ontological category" should not be understood as an *essential* division of "being." That is akin to a category mistake.

When we refer actuality or being to a subject, that is usually to refer to a subject as having a property or falling under a class of some kind. The "ontological" categories of the scholastics are the highest, most inclusive kinds of properties or classes there are. They are divisions of "being" in the sense that each is a determinate, one way of exemplifying actuality that is *incompatible* with other ways. For example, if something is a property-bearer (a substance), it could not also be a property. Knowing that one property or class *is not* another property or class, and that they cannot mutually be exemplified at the same time and in the same respect, is sufficient for coming to know these divisions of "being." One then can naturalistically investigate whether and in what way these classes and properties relate to each other (since properties and classes are not given a priori), thus coming to know what those classes and properties *refer to*.

We can return to the question of modal metaphysics that we began with. The skeptical problems do not straightforwardly affect the scholastic metametaphysics of form since the framework implicitly concedes the skeptical critique of "objectivity." There is no such thing as the objectivity the skeptics are looking for. But that kind of objectivity is not required to know or state that something exists or is actual. Metaphysics can begin in our investigation of *what* exists or is actual; that is, the *nature* or *form* of what we are judging to exist or be actual, since to attribute "being" is always and necessarily to attribute some *specific* way that something exists or is actual.[57] As long as there are facts about natures or forms of what exists, metaphysics is possible.

Skeptics might allege: "Doesn't *actuality* presume a modal context? If so, it looks as if the scholastics have reintroduced a priori modal knowledge by appealing to a primitive concept of 'being.'" The scholastic framework understands "actuality" as a term that differs in sense from "existence" or "being," but which refers to the same thing. So, while it is true that "actuality" connotes possibility or necessity in terms of its sense, what it refers to is simply *existence*. "Being" does not involve a modal context. Thus, it is truth-equivalent to talk about what is actual or what exists. "But

[57] This is complicated in one special case, as God exists concretely not as "being generically considered" but "existence itself subsisting"; see Eleonore Stump, "The Nature of a Simple God," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 87 (2013): 33–42.

can we know what is actual without, at least at the same time, coming to know modal facts?" The scholastic metametaphysics of form need take no stance on this question. Clearly, if we acquire modal knowledge simultaneously with knowing what is actual, scholastic metametaphysics has no problem accommodating modal knowledge; if modal facts about possible properties or classes were somehow known a priori, the scholastic paradigm can accommodate that too.

Nevertheless, an empiricist epistemology of someone like Bas van Fraassen aligns well with the scholastic paradigm. On empiricist views like his, knowledge of what is actual does not require knowledge of modal facts. Any modal claims relative to what is possible and necessary are fundamentally grounded in knowledge derived from sensation or observation. These epistemologies deny that modal claims about possibility and necessity have objective truth value since

> [modal claims about possibility and necessity] are in general context-dependent. The context in which they are asserted is one in which the speaker is holding something fixed, which together with the antecedent implies the consequent. What is held fixed tends to include a good deal of unformulated general opinion, but also some features specific to the case. The conditional has a truth value, relative to such a context; but that value will vary with context.[58]

Nevertheless, these views do not deny we know "objective" nonmodal truths.

If these empiricist epistemologies are true, then it follows we can know facts about what is actual without knowing other modal facts about what is possible/necessary. Our knowledge of what is actual can then be context-dependent in various ways, but if we can know the truth about *anything at all*, we can do metaphysics. We can "ascend" semantically, reflecting on the nature and character of experience, and come to ask what we are referring to or what the satisfaction or truth conditions are for those propositions regarding our experience. Those are the *forms* in question. Metaphysics is off and running.

The scholastic might also argue that their views are preferable to the deflationary views, since my imagined version of Carnap gave skeptical arguments that rule out his own account of existence, and thus should drive him toward anti-realism about existence. Carnap's account of existence clearly makes substantive and controversial metaphysical assumptions

[58] Monton and van Fraassen, "Constructive Empiricism and Modal Nominalism," 410.

that conflict with the deflationary approach: On his account, existence can only be attributed to *material* objects or properties. Yet, if it is senseless to talk about anything being essentially or *really* so-and-such, it seems senseless to refer to what is "material," since that refers to nothing. And that points to a deeper problem for Carnapian deflationary metaphysics: If the problem with metaphysics is that it involves speaking about what things *really* are, then the deflationary metaphysics cannot be stated coherently. That is, we have a dilemma.

Carnap generically denies that any truths about what exists are "really" or "objectively" true; that is, true in such a way that they would be true within any framework. Naturally, these claims are true within a metalanguage or framework. If Carnap concedes that these are *truths*, then we have metaphysics, since the language does not prohibit acquiring or expressing further truths about what things are, within that framework. There is actuality, and we express it in many different truth-equivalent ways. These facts do not mean there is nothing to be known, or nothing that it is to be anything, just that there are different ways of expressing what those things are.

If Carnap wants to block such claims, and insist this is not "really" metaphysics, because these truths make no claim about what things are "objectively," we could ask what he might mean by "objectively." Perhaps Carnap means that we are insisting that our own truths *are true*, and so we need to ascend out of our object-language into a metalanguage to express what truth is, and thus Carnap believes the facts of semantic ascent illustrate that we cannot coherently express *what it is for things to exist* within the same language we use to express the truths *about* what exists. But this is no problem, since expressing what things are is what it is to attribute existence. We attribute existence or being without ascending to a metalanguage. We only ascend to the metalanguage to describe what is going on – to *identify* instances of attributing being, actuality, and existence in the target-language. If Carnap's criticisms imply that ascending to a metalanguage means the claims *about* the target-language are necessarily false, that would be too strong, implicating in incoherence his own attempts to do linguistic philosophy. That is, at some level, the claims must be *true*. Metaphysics is off and running again.

If Carnap wants instead to double down, he can attempt to be deflationary about truth. But the kind of deflationism about truth required to circumvent the scholastic framework is serious and austere. The only ways to be skeptical about the scholastic metametaphysics involve either agnosticism about whether anything signifies anything, denying that anything

signifies anything, or affirming that anything signifies anything – quietism, alethic nihilism, and dialethism, respectively. Each of these will involve arguments that I take to be the only metaphysical skepticism worth its salt, as they will need to contend for a necessarily *global*, austere nominalism about "being" itself.[59] Historically, metametaphysical debates among scholastics largely occurred within controversies about the nature of universals.[60] That is no coincidence. However, for my purposes, I believe I have shown that scholastic metametaphysics of form bears serious consideration, not least of which because the only serious contender for rejecting scholastic metametaphysics involves engaging in a substantive metaphysical debate. This is exactly what we should expect, if we embrace the scholastic framework, as there is no science prior to metaphysics.

[59] Jamin Asay calls these "hard road nominalists" in *A Theory of Truthmaking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), ch. 9.

[60] See Gyula Klima, "The Medieval Problem of Universals," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (spring 2022 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/universals-medieval.

CHAPTER 3

Prime Matter Revisited

William M. R. Simpson

1 The Perplexities of Matter and Form

1.1 A Dilemma for Hylomorphism

Aristotle divided the natural world into substances that are made of matter (*hule*) and form (*morphe*). As Aristotle is generally understood, it is the substantial form of a substance that makes a substance *what it is*, determining those causal powers that are essential to its being a thing of that natural kind. It is in virtue of having a single substantial form that a substance is to be counted as a unified entity, whatever its size and however many its physical parts. His paradigmatic examples of substances are living beings.

Aristotle was not the first to appeal to forms in his philosophy of nature. Whereas Plato conceived the forms as transcendent kinds of which material things are but shadowy reflections, Aristotle maintained that the forms of natural beings – of things subject to change – cannot exist without being instantiated in matter. An Aristotelian form is supposed to be immanent within a substance in a way that a Platonic form is not. Aristotle thought of matter as something that underlies form and persists through change. A human being that grows from a child to an adult, for example, continues to have flesh and bones as its matter. Likewise, the flesh of a living being, according to Aristotle, is made from the elements of earth, water, fire, and air. Is there some level of matter underlying every substance or element that persists through every kind of change?

At this stage, a Dilemma for Hylomorphism emerges, for which there is little consensus concerning Aristotle's response: either matter at the lowest level must be defined independently of form (in which case, how do these distinct things combine to make one thing?) or matter always includes form in its definition (in which case, how does matter at the lowest level underlie form and persist through change?).

1.2 Two Problems with Prime Matter

Aquinas split the horns of this dilemma. He defined the lowest level of matter as a *pure potentiality* that is apt for the imposition of form but which lacks any determinate nature. Whereas *proximate matter* (e.g. flesh and bone) is determinately matter for a specific kind of form (living soul), the *prime matter* that underlies every form lacks any determinate nature and stands in potency to every kind of form. It is neither defined independently of form nor with reference to any particular form. Aquinas eventually came to believe that prime matter cannot exist apart from substantial form.

It is worth taking a moment to underscore the radical nature of Aquinas's proposal. First, he argues that "being in actuality is incompatible with matter's nature, since matter is a potential existent by its very nature," thus affirming that matter is essentially a being in potentiality and not in actuality.[1] Then, he claims, "it follows that matter can only actually exist by participating in actuality, and an actuality in which matter participates is just a form. Hence, it is the same thing to say that matter exists, and that matter has form."[2] So, according to Aquinas, prime matter has no *independent* existence: It exists only if it has a form. He goes so far as to say that even "God cannot make matter exist without form" because that would involve a logical contradiction.[3]

Aquinas's theory has the virtue of underscoring the *unity* of the hylomorphic composite. Prime matter does not make up a plurality of distinct things within the composite. Rather, prime matter has no independent existence apart from a substance because it is only the *potentiality* for substance. Aquinas does not need to posit a brute relation between prime matter and substantial form that somehow makes it the case that these entities unite to compose a single thing. Rather, the unity of a substance derives from the substantial form that *actualizes* the pure potentiality of prime matter.

1.2.1 The Substratum Objection

Nonetheless, many scholastics charged Aquinas's account of prime matter with being incoherent for precisely this reason. Scotus argued that to conceive matter as a pure potentiality that has no actuality apart from substantial form is tantamount to conceiving matter as *nonbeing*.[4] And if

[1] Aquinas, *Quodlibet* III.I as found in *Thomas Aquinas's Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Turner Nevitt and Brian Davies (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[2] Aquinas, *Quodlibet* III.I. [3] Aquinas, *Quodlibet* III.I.
[4] Richard Cross, *The Physics of Duns Scotus: The Scientific Context of a Theological Vision* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), ch. 1.

prime matter lacks any being of its own that *persists* independently of substantial form, then it cannot play the role of being the substratum of substantial change (in which one substance suffers corruption and another is generated). I shall call this the "Substratum Objection" to Aquinas's account.

In view of this objection, Scotus concluded that prime matter must have *some* actual being of its own, even if it falls short of the actuality of a fully fledged substance: "I say therefore, that matter is *per se* one principle of nature."[5] Although matter and form may never in fact be separated from one another, it is at least *logically possible*, in Scotus's view, that God could create prime matter apart from substantial form. In that case, it must be acknowledged to have *some* positive nature. Scotus proposed that prime matter is intrinsically divided into a continuum of parts, although these parts are not spatially extended apart from the presence of a substantial form that in-forms the matter.

1.2.2 The Physicalist Objection

Other scholastics were more emphatic in affirming the independence of prime matter from substantial form and in seeking to place these elements on a more equal ontological footing. They seized the first horn of the Dilemma for Hylomorphism in insisting that matter should make a contribution to the substance that can be characterized in physical terms. For Ockham, spatial extension is an intrinsic feature of matter that does not depend upon form. Indeed, Ockham argued that "it is impossible that matter should lack extension, since it is impossible that matter should exist without having one part at a distance from another."[6] For Suarez, it would seem that matter and form are particular objects that have their own causal powers. Composite substances, on Suarez's view, contain a number of distinct elements (matter, forms, capacities, habits) that causally interact with one another in complicated ways.

The challenge in seizing the first horn of the Dilemma for Hylomorphism is to account for how the distinct elements comprising a substance are supposed to be united in a way that constitutes a single, unified entity. In the first instance, there is prime matter, whose physical definition is independent of form. This primitive level of matter has its own intrinsic properties and its own causal powers. In the second instance, there is a higher level of matter that is in-formed by a substantial form. This higher level of matter also has its own intrinsic properties and powers. A hylomorphist, in that case,

[5] Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 2.12.1. [6] Ockham, *Summula* 1.19.24.

would seem to be committed to the existence of two different kinds of substantial beings within a substance. Yet for Aristotle, a collection of substances is an aggregate, not a unified entity, and the properties of an aggregate are explained in terms of the properties of its parts.

But perhaps aggregates are the only kinds of complex entities that exist. Indeed, from a modern standpoint, Aquinas's conception of prime matter is liable to a second indictment, inasmuch as it fails to accommodate any "bottom-up story" of how the physical parts of a complex entity contribute to the existence and properties of the whole – and this in defiance of contemporary physics, which is widely conceived as an inquiry that concerns the intrinsic properties of the basic constituents of which everything is made. Yet to maintain that prime matter is nothing but pure potentiality for substance would be to reduce the matter of a substance to its substantial form, according to Scotus, undermining the physical contribution that matter makes to the reality of the hylomorphic composite. I shall call this the "Physicalist Objection" to prime matter.

2 Modern Atomism and Its Discontents

Fast forward to recent times and the break with a hylomorphic conception of substances seems complete. Both matter (as something underlying substantial change) and form (as something that actualizes matter) were absent from the analytic metaphysics of the last century, along with middle-sized substances like living beings, whose properties supervene upon the properties of their most basic physical parts. If the story of how nature unfolds for Aquinas was a "top-down" story about how substantial forms actualize the potentiality of prime matter, the story of how nature unfolds for modern philosophers has been a "bottom-up" story of how certain microphysical constituents are arranged. Yet this vision of reality has increasingly come under pressure from both philosophy and science.

Herein lies an opportunity to revisit a more Thomistic understanding of prime matter.

2.1 Properties without Matter?

Let's begin by considering the standard neo-Humean account of nature, which might be seen as the gold standard of microphysicalism. According to the analytic philosopher David Lewis, one of the leading lights in the revival of metaphysics of the last century,

> all there is to the world is a vast mosaic of local matters of particular fact, just one little thing and then another . . . We have geometry: a system of external relations of spatio-temporal distances between points . . . And at those points we have local qualities: perfectly natural intrinsic properties which need nothing bigger than a point at which to be instantiated. For short, we have an arrangement of qualities. And that is all.[7]

This vision of reality is sometimes called the "Humean mosaic." In this picture, the local qualities (properties) are imagined as an arrangement of tiles that can be recombined freely to compose other possible mosaics, since there is no ultimate reason why the tiles that make up the mosaic of the actual world are arranged in any particular way.

For Lewis, change in the world is simply a matter of different properties being instantiated at different times. There is no matter that underlies change or any such thing as substantial change. Likewise, the causal capacities we happen to associate with the objects of scientific inquiry are neither fundamental nor grounded in forms. They reflect nothing more than a human habitus for systematization. Although the physical properties that make up the Humean mosaic lack any necessary connections, they can be related within a "Best System" of laws, in which a law is simply a "contingent generalization that appears as a theorem (or axiom) in each of the true deductive systems that achieve a best combination of simplicity and strength."[8] These universal laws add nothing to the basic ontology but merely supervene upon the total Humean mosaic. Indeed, for the modern Humean, the whole truth about the world, including the truth about living things, supervenes upon the intrinsic properties of (and spatiotemporal relations between) the set of fundamental constituents picked out by our "best physics."

2.2 *Powers, Emergence, and Entanglement: Three Objections*

The doctrine of *Humean Supervenience* that I have just described is the paradigm case of a "bottom-up" account of nature in contemporary metaphysics, one in which the causal capacities of complex, macroscopic things supervene upon the properties of their simpler, microscopic constituents and the laws of nature. This neo-Humean account makes no appeal to metaphysical constituents like matter and form but only to physical properties localized at points within spacetime. For this reason, neo-Humeanism is often presented as offering a more "scientific" account

[7] David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1986), ix.
[8] David Lewis, *Counterfactuals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 73.

of reality than either Aristotle's or Aquinas's philosophies of nature. Yet there are many reasons to doubt that this account is a good fit with the sciences today.

In the first place, by insisting that the basic properties comprising the Humean mosaic can be freely recombined to form different possible worlds, neo-Humeans are committed to the metaphysical claim that there is a possible world W^* in which things have exactly the same properties as in the actual world W but their causal powers are swapped. For example, negatively charged particles in W might have the power to attract rather than repel one another in W^*, while oppositely charged particles might have the power to repel instead of attract.[9] By divorcing the identities of these properties from their causal powers, however, the neo-Humean "condemns us to necessary ignorance" concerning their natures, as Bird points out, tiling their mosaic with entities whose natures are hidden from the natural sciences. Indeed, neo-Humeans seem to get things epistemically backwards: As the philosopher of science, Nancy Cartwright, has argued, successful sciences are those that actively isolate things' causal capacities (or powers) rather than passively observing universal laws of nature.[10] I shall refer to this as the "Causal Powers Concern" for any scientifically informed metaphysics.

In the second place, by insisting that the whole truth about nature, including the truth about living beings, should supervene upon some set of fundamental facts disclosed by our best physics, neo-Humeanism has saddled its philosophy of science with an implausibly strong form of reductionism in its conception of how the natural sciences are related. The last few decades have witnessed the rapid development of the philosophies of the specialized sciences, such as the philosophy of chemistry and of biology, which have increasingly asserted the autonomy of chemical and biological theories in relation to physics. There has also been a renewed emphasis on the possibility of "strong" forms of emergence, in which complex systems are attributed causal powers that are irreducible to the powers of their microscopic constituents.[11] I shall call this the "Emergence

[9] Alexander Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics: Law and Properties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 70–81.

[10] Nancy Cartwright, *The Dappled World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For Aristotle, as for Aquinas, by contrast, we learn about the natures of the substances that comprise our world *through* their causal powers.

[11] For Aristotle, as for Aquinas, the possibility of complex things having causal powers that are irreducible to the powers of their physical parts is rendered intelligible through the existence of substantial forms that inform substances of different sizes and degrees of complexity; see William Simpson, *Hylomorphism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

Problem" that must also be addressed by any scientifically informed metaphysics.

In the third place, even if the microscopic constituents of macroscopic objects evolve according to physical laws, it does not follow that the properties of complex things are reducible to (or supervene upon) the properties of their microscopic constituents. Indeed, it is widely accepted that the theory of quantum mechanics, which superseded classical physics, is incompatible with the doctrine of Humean Supervenience, as it was formulated by Lewis. As Tim Maudlin has pointed out: The existence of quantum-entangled states is inconsistent with the claim that the complete physical state of the world supervenes on the intrinsic properties of and spatiotemporal relations between some privileged set of point-sized constituents.[12] I shall dub this the "Quantum Entanglement Puzzle," on which I shall focus for the remainder of this section.

2.3 *The Entanglement Puzzle*[13]

To understand the somewhat technical problem that is posed by the Quantum Entanglement Puzzle to certain "bottom-up" accounts of nature, consider the famous Einstein, Podolsky, and Rosen (EPR) experiment involving two particles originally proposed by Einstein and his collaborators.[14] In David Bohm's version of the experiment, one particle is constrained to be "spin-up" $|\uparrow\rangle$ when another is measured to be "spin-down" $|\downarrow\rangle$, and vice versa, however far apart the two particles are spatially separated.[15] The physical system is said to be in a *quantum-entangled superposition* that is described by the "singlet state":

$$|\psi\rangle_{1,2} = \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}(|\uparrow\rangle_1|\downarrow\rangle_2 - |\downarrow\rangle_1|\uparrow\rangle_2). \quad (1)$$

According to this formalism, when a system comprising two particles (1 and 2) is in the singlet state $|\psi\rangle_{1,2}$, there is a probability of 1/2 that we

[12] John Stewart Bell, "On the Einstein Podolsky Rosen Paradox," *Physics Physique Fizika* 1:3 (1964): 195–200; Tim Maudlin, *The Metaphysics within Physics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[13] This section draws upon William Simpson, "From Quantum Physics to Classical Metaphysics," in *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature*, ed. William Michael Richard Simpson, Robert Charles Koons, and James Orr (New York: Routledge, 2021), 21–65 and some sentences are quoted verbatim.

[14] Albert Einstein, Boris Podolsky, and Nathan Rosen, "Can Quantum-Mechanical Description of Physical Reality Be Considered Complete?" *Physical Review* 47:10 (1935): 777–780.

[15] In Einstein's original version of the EPR experiment, the measurements are of position and momentum.

will observe particle 1 to be "spin up" $|\uparrow\rangle_1$ and particle 2 to be "spin down" $|\downarrow\rangle_2$; and there is a probability of 1/2 that we will observe particle 1 to be "spin down" $|\downarrow\rangle_1$ and particle 2 to be "spin up" $|\uparrow\rangle_2$. There are no other physically possible outcomes. This anti-correlation between the vertical spins of two particles, although curious, is not what frustrates the doctrine of Humean Supervenience. The challenge that such systems pose is the fact that we cannot explain the statistics we obtain for different angles of spin in terms of the *local properties* of their constituent parts.

Suppose two quantum-entangled particles that are emitted from a common source fly off in opposite directions, and two experimenters (traditionally, "Alice" and "Bob") measure the spins of each particle using different measuring devices. Let ϕ_A specify the configuration of Alice's apparatus and A the outcome of her experiment; likewise, ϕ_B for Bob's apparatus, and B for his outcome. The measuring apparatus in each case is a Stern–Gerlach device, in which a pointer has the possibility of being deflected up or down, and the configuration parameters are the two angles of polarization of each device, ϕ_A and ϕ_B. These parameters can be set at an appropriate angle for measuring vertical spin but they can also be adjusted separately to produce a range of measurement outcomes. Let λ denote whatever in the past may have influenced the behavior of the system being measured, including the physical state of the two-particle system prior to measurement.

According to the physicist John Bell, the principle of locality requires:[16]

$$P_{\phi a,\,\phi b}(A|B,\lambda) = P_{\phi a}(A|\lambda), \tag{2}$$

$$P_{\phi a,\,\phi b}(B|A,\lambda) = P_{\phi b}(B|\lambda). \tag{3}$$

This formalization should be parsed as follows: If the principle of locality is true, then the probability P for Alice obtaining outcome A can be fixed by conditionalizing on the configuration of her apparatus ϕ_a, and whatever in the past influenced its behavior λ, such as the local properties of the particle she measures. Significantly, in a world in which locality holds and the two measurements are conducted simultaneously, conditionalizing on the configuration of Bob's apparatus ϕ_b and outcome B does not change the probabilities for Alice's outcome. Hence, the two probabilities in the first equation are stated to be equal. This is also the case for Bob's outcome with

[16] Bell, "On the Einstein Podolsky Rosen Paradox."

respect to Alice's apparatus, which is reflected in the equality of the two probabilities in the second equation.

However, Bell's theorem demonstrates that the principle of locality is *violated* by the phenomenon of quantum entanglement. According to quantum mechanics, the probabilities for obtaining a measurement outcome in one part of the experiment depend on the outcome obtained in the other part of the experiment, in spite of the fact that the two measurement events are sufficiently separated in space to prevent one measurement event from influencing the outcome of the other by means of any physical mechanism. After all, we know from the theory of relativity that there is a limit to how fast a signal can travel in space (i.e. no faster than the speed of light). In fact, quantum mechanics predicts that the measurement statistics will depend on the *relative* angle between the two devices, $\phi_A - \phi_B$; a fact that neither particle, considered separately, is in a position to "know."

While the EPR experiment was originally advanced as a thought-experiment by Einstein and his associates that was intended as a *reductio ad absurdum* of quantum mechanics, it is now widely accepted that subsequent experiments have confirmed beyond reasonable doubt the statistics predicted by quantum mechanics.[17] There are consequently good empirical reasons for rejecting the claim that the whole truth about nature supervenes upon the local and intrinsic properties of microphysical constituents that make up the whole of macroscopic reality.

2.4 Matter without Properties?

How should Humeans respond to the Quantum Entanglement Puzzle? They might begin by observing that the quantum state of a (non-relativistic) system of N particles is defined in 3 N-dimensional space rather than the ordinary three-dimensional space or four-dimensional spacetime in which scientists conduct their experiments.[18] Each point in this high-dimensional space corresponds to a total configuration of the N particles,

[17] A. Aspect, J. Dalibard, and G. Roger, "Experimental Test of Bell's Inequalities Using Time-Varying Analyzers," *Physical Review Letters* 49 (1982): 1804–1807. For three recent experimental tests of Bell's inequalities, which close two "loopholes" in Bell's theorem and underscore the failure of locality, see Marissa Giustina et al., "Significant-Loophole-Free Test of Bell's Theorem with Entangled Photons," *Physical Review Letters* 115:25 (2015): 250401; B. Hensen et al., "Loophole-Free Bell Inequality Violation Using Electron Spins Separated by 1.3 Kilometres," *Nature* 526:75 (2015): 682–686; Lynden Shalm et al., "Strong Loophole-Free Test of Local Realism," *Physical Review Letters* 115(25) (2015): 250402.

[18] That is, the quantum state projected into the position basis.

and the quantum state defined on this configuration space, more commonly known as the wave function, encodes the probability of the particles being found in that particular configuration. The wave function spreads out in 3 *N*-dimensional configuration space according to the dynamics specified by the Schrödinger equation, and as it spreads the actual state of the particles in three-dimensional space becomes increasingly indeterminate while different possible configurations in three-dimensional space become increasingly correlated.

A question then arises: If the temporal development of all the particles in the world is closed under the famous Schrödinger equation, why isn't this indeterminacy in the properties of the microscopic particles transmitted up to the macroscopic level? After all, if the macroscopic world is made of these indeterminate microscopic constituents, then why do we fail to have situations in which the pointers on a macroscopic device that measures a particle's spin exist in an indeterminate superposition of pointing up and down at the same time? Why don't we live in a world in which macroscopic living beings, such as the cat in Schrödinger's notorious thought-experiment, can exist in a superposition of being both dead and alive at the same time? It seems that standard quantum mechanics undermines itself, making it impossible to recover the manifest image of observation and experimentation, in which measurements are seen to produce determinate outcomes.

This is the famous "measurement problem" of quantum mechanics for which various solutions have been proposed. I shall mention just three of the principal ones here. According to the theory put forward by Ghirardi, Rimini, and Weber (GRW theory), we should adopt a modified Schrödinger dynamics in which the wave function undergoes spontaneous collapse.[19] The effects of this modification of the quantum dynamics become significant when a large number of entangled particles are involved, limiting the spread of the wave function and localizing macroscopic collections of particles in physical space. This explains why we do not witness macroscopic superpositions. The "pilot wave theory" of de Broglie and Bohm, on the other hand, rejects any modification in the quantum dynamics, while denying that the particles that comprise physical systems in three-dimensional space are indeterminate with respect to their positions. This theory suggests we should think of the wave function defined in the high-dimensional configuration space as choreographing

[19] G. C. Ghirardi, A. Rimini, and T. Weber, "Unified Dynamics for Microscopic and Macroscopic Systems," *Physical Review* 34(2) (1986): 470–491.

the trajectories of the particles in the low-dimensional physical space, and it proposes an equation of motion for the particle configuration that depends on the wave function.[20] Since macroscopic measuring devices are made of particles that always have definite positions, this explains why the pointers on our measuring devices are never in superpositions of pointing up and down at the same time. The "many worlds" theory originally put forward by Everett also rejects any collapse in the wave function. Unlike de Broglie and Bohm's theory, however, it denies that quantum measurements lead to definite outcomes.

According to Wallace's contemporary formulation of this theory, different macroscopic "worlds" may be said to emerge in which the different possible measurement outcomes that quantum mechanics predicts for an experiment are realized. Although these emergent worlds share the same spacetime, however, they do not interact with one another, which is why we do not witness all these different possible outcomes.

A second question arises, however, regardless of which solution to the measurement problem we adopt: What is the *ontological relationship* between the wave function in the high-dimensional space and the particles in the low-dimensional space? Some philosophers have claimed that quantum mechanics compels us to identify the fundamental space in which physical reality exists as the high-dimensional space of the wave function, and to treat the low-dimensional space of particles (as well as scientists and their measuring devices) as somehow *emerging* from this high-dimensional space. Indeed, some neo-Humeans have argued that the doctrine of Humean Supervenience can be reconciled straightforwardly with the theory of quantum mechanics by conceiving the Humean mosaic in terms of intrinsic properties instantiated at points in this high-dimensional space.

Yet this revisionary account of physical space is subject to some worrying objections. In the first place, the concept of a configuration space in which each point denotes a distinct particle configuration seems to *presuppose* the existence of a three-dimensional space in which scientists conduct their experiments. As Bell observed, we cannot begin to inquire concerning the amplitude or phase of a wave function until

[20] David Bohm, *Quantum Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1951); David Bohm, "A Suggested Interpretation of the Quantum Theory in Terms of 'Hidden' Variables. I," *Physical Review* 85(2) (1952): 166–179; Louis de Broglie, "La nouvelle dynamique des quanta," in *Electrons et photons. Rapports et discussions du cinquième Conseil de physique tenu à Bruxelles du 24 au 29 octobre 1927 sous les auspices de l'Institut international de physique Solvay* (Paris: Gauthier-Villars, 1928), 105–132 (English translation in G. Bacciagaluppi and A. Valentini (eds.), *Quantum Theory at the Crossroads: Reconsidering the 1927 Solvay Conference*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 341–371).

a multitude of points in three-dimensional space has been specified.[21] By reifying the high-dimensional space in which the wave function is defined, however, and treating the low-dimensional space of the particles as something less fundamental, aren't we putting the mathematical cart (configuration space) before the physical horse (the particles), thus confusing the mathematical model with the physical reality that it is supposed to be modeling? In the second place, there does not appear to be any uniquely privileged mapping between the supposedly fundamental high-dimensional space of the wave function and the supposedly emergent three-dimensional space of the particles; that is, not one that could secure the existence of the world in which scientists conduct experiments in any ontologically robust sense.[22] After all, why should a three-dimensional world containing particles, scientists, and their measuring devices, rather than some other world containing different sorts of low-dimensional entities, supervene upon the high-dimensional world of the wave function? As Koons has argued, there are *many* different low-dimensional worlds that could emerge from the high-dimensional world of the wave function.[23] Do they *all* supervene upon the wave function? (If so, why are we fortunate enough to live in an emergent world that supports scientific inquiry?)[24]

In view of objections such as these, some philosophers might be tempted to conceive the ontological relationship between the wave function and the particles as a *dualistic* relationship in which they are placed on a more equal footing. Perhaps the wave function in de Broglie–Bohm theory, which choreographs the trajectories of the particles, functions like a Cartesian soul by pushing around all the particles. Each particle would be a substance of one kind, existing in a physical domain of reality that is characterized by three or four physical dimensions, with the wave function, a substance of another kind, existing in a different domain of reality characterized by a far higher number of dimensions. The challenge for this dualistic vision of reality,

[21] John Stewart Bell, *Speakable and Unspeakable in Quantum Mechanics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), ch. 22.

[22] See Bradley Monton, "Wave Function Ontology," *Synthese* 130(2) (2002): 265–277.

[23] Robert Koons, "The Many Worlds Interpretation of QM: A Hylomorphic Critique and Alternative," in *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Contemporary Science*, ed. William M. R. Simpson, Robert C. Koons, and Nicholas J. Teh (New York: Routledge, 2017), 61–103.

[24] Allori argues that if the equations of quantum mechanics only describe a mathematical object in a high-dimensional space, we must add something to our ontology to make contact with scientists' descriptions of the measurement outcomes they obtain in ordinary space; see V. Allori, S. Goldstein, R. Tumulka, and N. Zanghì, "On the Common Structure of Bohmian Mechanics and the Ghirardi-Rimini-Weber Theory: Dedicated to Gian Carlo Ghirardi on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday," *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 59:3 (2008): 370.

however, is to account for how (and why) these two essentially different kinds of reality are supposed to interact with one another. Moreover, the particles have no reciprocal influence upon the wave function. In certain versions of the de Broglie–Bohm theory, this would reduce the domain of reality in which scientists conduct their experiments to playing a passive role in the unfolding of nature.

2.5 A Nomological Approach

Emergence and dualism, however, are not the only options. According to the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics, the wave function enters the account through the *nomological role* it plays in specifying the dynamics of a primitive distribution of matter in three-dimensional space (or four-dimensional spacetime). Different types of matter have been proposed that follow different dynamics in order to fit with the different solutions to the measurement problem that have been put forward. In the de Broglie–Bohm theory, the matter consists of particles that follow continuous trajectories. For GRW theory, two different types of matter have been proposed: according to GRWm theory, there is a matter-field of varying density, where the density of the matter spreads with the unitary evolution of the wave function and contracts when the wave function undergoes spontaneous collapse; in GRWf theory, there are flashes corresponding to the collapse events. For the many worlds theory, the matter consists of flashes (or a matter-field) in which all of the different measurement outcomes are realized, and different macroscopic objects belonging to different "worlds" are permitted to overlap with one another in spacetime.

The matter in all of these models is "primitive" in the following senses: First, it cannot be read off the formalism of standard quantum mechanics or deduced from any other concept or the vocabulary of a physical theory. It is posited for the sake of empirical adequacy. Secondly, it has no intrinsic physical properties at all.[25] Any properties that scientists may happen to predicate of microscopic entities, in describing interactions between them, enter into this account solely through the dynamical role they play in describing local regularities in the distribution of matter. Thirdly, every observable phenomenon with which the physical sciences are concerned is ontologically explained and reduced to the motion of the primitive matter. A primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics aims to explain the measurement outcomes of quantum experiments, and the physical

[25] Michael Esfeld, "A Proposal for a Minimalist Ontology," *Synthese* 197 (2020): 1889–1905.

behavior of the macroscopic measuring devices used to obtain them, by offering an account of the empirical content of a physical theory that is exhausted by its statements about this primitive distribution of matter.

Given the sparse nature of matter in the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics, however, what explains *why* the matter behaves in a way that is correctly described by the laws of quantum mechanics? For a "Super-Humean," like Esfeld, the primitive ontology approach affords a way of restoring the doctrine of Humean Supervenience without having to relocate physical reality within the high-dimensional space of the wave function. In the case of the de Broglie–Bohm theory, for example, the new Humean mosaic is conceived to contain nothing more than the *positions* of the Bohmian particles.[26] All of the intrinsic properties that populated Lewis's ontology have been swept away – along with their hidden quiddities. According to Esfeld, all that remains are *matter points* that lack any intrinsic properties whatsoever, since they are nothing over and above the distance relations in which they stand.[27] The properties that scientists predicate of particles, along with the wave function of quantum mechanics, can all supposedly be recovered using a Humean "Best Systems" account of laws.

Esfeld describes this conception of matter as a "materia prima"; that is, a kind of prime matter.[28] After all, it lacks any intrinsic properties of its own, like mass or charge. This Super-Humean theory of matter is closer to Descartes's conception of matter, however, than to Aquinas's theory, as Esfeld observes: "we thereby join the old Cartesian tradition of conceiving matter as *res extensa* only."[29] Just as Descartes invokes nothing but the motion of particles, so Super-Humeans invoke nothing but an arrangement of matter points. Neither Descartes nor Super-Humeans invoke a substantial form to actualize or determine any of the properties of matter.

2.5.1 Laws, Persistence, and Possible Worlds: Three Objections

There are good reasons, however, for suspecting that an ontology of matter without forms is too sparse for constructing a philosophy of nature. In the first place, it is far from clear that a Humean mosaic consisting solely of matter points can account for the truth about nature's laws. It is not merely that the Mill–Ramsey–Lewis account introduces a degree of anthropocentricity into

[26] Esfeld, "A Proposal for a Minimalist Ontology."
[27] Michael Esfeld, "Quantum Humeanism, or: Physicalism without Properties," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 64:256 (2014): 453–470.
[28] Esfeld, "A Proposal for a Minimalist Ontology."
[29] Esfeld, "A Proposal for a Minimalist Ontology," 141.

the definition of laws that is difficult to square with the requirements of scientific realism.[30] More worryingly, as Matarese has argued: "if we do not regard some properties other than particle position as ontologically fundamental, it is impossible . . . to achieve a consensus . . . on what the best system may be."[31] For Humeans to decide whether a statement of regularity is part of the best system, they are supposed to compare different systems formulated in a common language of predicates that pick out elite properties in the Humean mosaic. These are sparse, natural properties that should exist independently of our conceptual schemes. The problem with Super-Humeanism, however, is that "it is not possible to perform such a comparison if the different systems use significantly different languages, and thus different sets of basic kinds, to formulate the laws of nature."[32] I shall refer to this as the "Nomological Indeterminacy" of the Super-Humean's approach to scientific realism.

In the second place, it is not clear that an ontology consisting solely of matter points can explain the persistence through time of any of the objects of scientific inquiry – including the particles that follow the trajectories prescribed by the de Broglie–Bohm theory.[33] The matter points are meant to be identical to a structure of distance relations, and this structure is supposed to constitute the space in which the particles move. Yet there is nothing to unite distinct structures of distance relations (each of which is identical to an *instantaneous* configuration of matter points) in such a way that they could constitute particles with *persisting* identities that follow continuous trajectories. Moreover, Super-Humeans must posit a primitive arrow of change to explain why one set of distance relations follows another, which adds to their theoretical costs. I shall group these issues together as the "Persisting Identity Problem" for Super-Humeanism.

Finally, the theory of Super-Humeanism has some implausible modal implications. Although many physical theories admit models of the universe that have high levels of symmetry, the Super-Humean must rule out the possibility of symmetric configurations of particles, since the particles that make up such arrangements cannot be individuated in terms of their distance relations.[34] It also rules out the possibility of the laws of quantum

[30] What counts as the "best system" depends on subjective standards of what counts as simplicity and strength.

[31] Vera Matarese, "A Challenge for Super-Humeanism: The Problem of Immanent Comparisons," *Synthese* 197 (2020): 4007.

[32] Matarese, "A Challenge for Super-Humeanism," 4008.

[33] William M. R. Simpson, "What's the Matter with Super-Humeanism?" *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 72:3 (2020): 893–911.

[34] Simpson, "What's the Matter with Super-Humeanism?"

mechanics obtaining in Small Worlds that have only a few particles. On the Mill–Ramsey–Lewis account, it is metaphysically impossible for such laws to obtain in a world that has only a few particles, since the number of elements in its supervenience base is too impoverished to make the relevant law of nature the best description of that world. The Best Systems account – if it functions at all – would deliver much simpler laws in such worlds.[35] I shall refer to these issues as the "Problem of Small Worlds" and the "Problem of Symmetric Worlds," respectively.

In the light of these difficulties, one might be tempted to endow the matter in the primitive ontology with primitive identities and to reify the laws that concern its distribution in physical space. Yet such maneuvers are hardly illuminating and they come with additional theoretical costs. How can an abstract fact constitute an explanation of the way in which concrete particles are arranged in the physical world? Perhaps a law could serve as a causal explanation by being a fundamental relation instantiated by elite properties that somehow necessitates change. Yet a primitive distribution of matter fails to instantiate any of the elite properties that might be thought to enter into such nomological relations, whether or not that matter is endowed with primitive identities. Indeed, to adopt a metaphysics of matter in which every particle has a primitive identity would be to flood the Humean mosaic with an abundance of properties that have hidden quiddities (one for each particle). In short, the kind of "bottom-up" stories that modern philosophers frequently favor do not straightforwardly apply to a world with quantum-mechanical laws.

3 Prime Matter Revisited

Neo-Aristotelian approaches to the metaphysics of quantum mechanics have been emerging in contemporary analytic philosophy, however, which restore a "top-down" role for form in determining the properties of matter.[36]

[35] William M. R. Simpson, "Small Worlds with Cosmic Powers," *Journal of Philosophy* 120:8 (2023): 401–420.

[36] See, e.g., Robert Koons, "The Many Worlds Interpretation of QM" and "Thermal Substances: A Neo-Aristotelian Ontology of the Quantum World," *Synthese* 198 (suppl. 11) (2021): 2751–2772; Alexander Pruss, "A Travelling Forms Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics," in *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Contemporary Science* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 105–122; William M. R. Simpson, "Cosmic Hylomorphism," *European Journal for Philosophy of Science* 11:28 (2021): doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/s13194-020-00342-5 and "From Quantum Physics to Classical Metaphysics," in *Neo-Aristotelian Metaphysics and the Theology of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2022), and William M. R. Simpson and John Pemberton, "Cosmic Hylomorphism vs Bohmian Dispositionalism: Implications of the 'No-Successor Problem'," in *Quantum Mechanics and*

Among these recent developments are hylomorphic modifications of the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics, which seek to overcome the problems I identified with Humean metaphysics in Section 2.[37] In conceiving matter as deriving its physical properties from substantial form, does this new, hylomorphic approach recover something like Aquinas's conception of prime matter – and avoid the problems identified in Section 1?

3.1 *In-forming Matter*

I shall begin with the theory of cosmic hylomorphism, which advances a novel version of the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics in which entities made of primitive matter acquire certain properties by being *in-formed*. This theory was initially developed for the de Broglie–Bohm version of quantum mechanics but is equally applicable both to GRW theory and the many worlds theory. In the original account, the cosmos is conceived as a single substance that has a power to choreograph the trajectories of the particles of which it is comprised.[38]

The theory of cosmic hylomorphism deals with the causal powers concern (Section 2.1) and the problem of nomological indeterminacy (Section 2.2) by adopting a metaphysic in which laws express the essence of powers.[39] While laws do not add anything to the basic ontology, they are grounded in powers that exist independently of our conceptual schemes. In the theory of cosmic hylomorphism, it is the cosmic power of the cosmic substance that is expressed by the Bohmian law of motion, and the wave function represents this cosmic power.

A hylomorphic analysis of the substance that exercises this causal power is needed to explain why this power persists in spite of the fact that the particles comprising this substance are continually changing. The matter of this substance is conceived as a substrate of prime material entities that have the *potential* to be electrons, positrons, or other kinds of particles, inasmuch as they have the potential to form entities that move in relation to one another in different ways. The form of this substance, which *actualizes* the potentiality of its matter, is conceived as something that persists *per se*. The cosmic form thus

Fundamentality: Naturalizing Quantum Theory between Scientific Realism and Ontological Indeterminacy, ed. V. Allori (New York: Springer, 2022), 269–282.

[37] See Simpson and Pemberton, "Cosmic Hylomorphism" and Simpson, "From Quantum Physics to Classical Metaphysics."

[38] See Simpson, "Cosmic Hylomorphism." [39] See Bird, *Nature's Metaphysics*, ch. 9.

constitutes the formal cause of the cosmic substance, which explains the *unity* of the substance, because the particles exist only as dependent parts of this substance. They have no physical existence apart from the whole of which they are parts.

Since the particles derive their persisting identities from the cosmic form, the theory of cosmic hylomorphism is able to overcome both the persisting identity problem and the problem of symmetric worlds (Section 2.2). Since the cosmic form has the property of transworld sameness, existing in worlds that have large and small numbers of particles, this theory is able to address the problem of small worlds (Section 2.2).[40] The cosmic hylomorphist can also solve the Entanglement Puzzle without committing the extravagance of reifying the high-dimensional space in which the wave function is defined (Section 2.1). It is because a quantum-entangled system instantiates a *form* that the properties of the system as a whole fail to supervene upon the properties of the individual, spatially separated particles of which it is comprised (Section 2.1). To appeal to a cause of the non-local correlations associated with the phenomenon of quantum entanglement is not necessarily to defy the superluminal ban imposed by the special theory of relativity. An instantaneous *formal* cause does not depend upon a mechanism with moving parts that we could potentially exploit to send instant messages. It is only *efficient* causes, mediated by physical entities, that must abide by the superluminal ban.

Of course, a metaphysical model in which the world contains only *one* substance departs from Aristotle's and Aquinas's visions of nature, in which middle-sized entities, such as living beings, may be counted as substances. Koons has suggested a more liberal reading of the theory of cosmic hylomorphism, however, which is consistent with the existence of multiple substances. In this version, the movements of the particles (or the occurrence of flashes, or the spreading and contracting of the matter-field) are choreographed *jointly* by the forms of *groups* of entangled substances.[41] The relations of mutual entanglement constitute a kind of group accident – an *accidental form* that is collectively instantiated by all of the substances that are members of the group. This accidental form grounds the relevant equation of motion.

To posit the existence of group accidents that confer causal powers is not to depart in any significant way from either Aristotle's or Aquinas's

[40] See William M. R. Simpson, "Small Worlds with Cosmic Powers," *Journal of Philosophy* 120:8 (2023): 401–420.

[41] Koons, "Prime Matter and the Quantum Wavefunction," *Ancient Philosophy Today* 6:1 (2024): 92–119.

metaphysics. As Koons observes, Aristotle was not an ontological individualist (cf. *Politics* I, 1253a8–40; *Nicomachean Ethics* IX, 1170b3–19).[42] He recognized that the citizens of a city, for example, may possess causal powers that are irreducibly social in nature. In the same way, Koons suggests, a plurality of substances might form groups of mutually entangled entities in which membership of such a group affects their microscopic potentialities in a way that is irreducibly relational. In the extreme case of global entanglement assumed by the de Broglie–Bohm theory and the many worlds theory, the whole cosmos would constitute a single entanglement group represented by a universal wave function.

How are the members of these groups to be individuated? Koons has theorized that, prior to the existence of any living beings in the universe, the physical world consisted solely of "thermal substances," which are entities that have properties best described using the theory of quantum statistical mechanics.[43] Such systems admit representations in which certain thermal and chemical properties can be defined in what is called the "thermodynamic limit."[44] These macroscopic properties are not quantum-entangled with the properties of other systems. In Koons's view, they are emergent and irreducible properties of thermal substances, and these properties individuate the members of these groups of mutually entangled entities. Koons has thus identified a way of dealing with the Emergence Problem and of conceiving emergent substances (Section 2.1) that can be applied to the hylomorphic version of the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics, although these proposals require further development.[45]

3.2 *Whose Theory of Prime Matter?*

So, what is the nature of the matter in the primitive ontology approach to quantum mechanics? The matter is supposed to fix certain facts about the *spatial positions* of things, such as the physical parts of a measuring device that is being used in an experiment. According to advocates of this approach, there are certain states of affairs that must be acknowledged to be spatially distinct for the sake of empirical adequacy, such as the pointer on a measuring device pointing in one direction rather than another. This is why we need to posit a primitive distribution of matter in physical space

[42] Koons, "Prime Matter and the Quantum Wavefunction."
[43] See Koons, "Thermal Substances: A Neo-Aristotelian Ontology of the Quantum World."
[44] In this limit, a system with N particles and volume V is replaced by one in which the parameters N and V are taken to infinity, while the density N/V is kept constant.
[45] See Simpson, "From Quantum Physics to Classical Metaphysics."

from which these macroscopic entities are made. The wave function is supposed to play a nomological role in determining how this primitive distribution of matter evolves in physical space. The *intrinsic nature* of the matter, however, depends on the metaphysics of how these spatial properties inhere within matter and how they develop in time according to physical laws.

In the Super-Humean metaphysic, matter is *intrinsically partitioned* into a certain number of discrete parts; namely, the matter points, which are nothing over and above the distance relations in which they stand. This recalls Scotus's attempt to offer a positive characterization of matter apart from form, although for Scotus the parts into which matter was portioned were continuous rather than discrete. Moreover, it is *constituted* by distance relations and is therefore *intrinsically extended*, an essential characterization that the Super-Humean notion of matter shares with both Ockham's and Descartes's conceptions of matter. There is nothing else that this primitive distribution of matter depends upon for any of its spatial or mereological properties. The Super-Humean therefore follows Descartes rather than Ockham in rejecting a role for substantial form.

In the hylomorphic metaphysic, by contrast, form plays a significant role in determining the properties of matter. In the first place, the causal powers of any portion of matter, such as the powers of the particles in Bohmian mechanics, are grounded in form.[46] This is because the powers of the particles are continually changing and a form is needed to explain how they collectively instantiate the persisting power that is expressed by the Bohmian law. So, the prime material entities from which the particles are constructed do not possess powers *per se* but only *per aliud*. In the second place, the identities of any physical entities that persist through time, such as Bohmian particles, are also grounded in form.[47] By stipulation, the prime material entities that individuate the particles lack any intrinsic properties that persist through time. They derive their identities, however, from being parts of a temporally extended process that is prior to its temporal parts, which manifests a power to choreograph the trajectories of the particles. This process is prior to its temporal parts because it is intrinsically ordered by the *telos* to which this power is directed.[48] This

[46] See Simpson, "Cosmic Hylomorphism."

[47] See Simpson, "What's the Matter with Super-Humeanism?" and M. Mosko and Simpson, "Whose Hylomorphism? Which Theory of Prime Matter?" *Ancient Philosophy Today: Dialogoi* 6:1 (2024): 65–91.

[48] See Simpson and Pemberton, "Cosmic Hylomorphism vs Bohmian Dispositionalism."

power is grounded in a form. So, once again, the prime material entities do not persist *per se* but only *per aliud*, deriving their identities from the form.

What of the spatial properties of the prime material? This is somewhat more difficult to assess and the results may depend upon which version of quantum mechanics we adopt.[49] In the modern version of the de Broglie–Bohm theory, the equation of motion for the particles determines the velocities of the particles in a way that depends on the wave function, but the initial spatial distribution of the particles remains undetermined. This is not the case for either the matter-field or flash ontologies constructed for GRW theory and the many worlds theory, where the spatial density profile of the matter-field and the positions of the flashes are derived directly from the wave function. This suggests that the spatial character of the Bohmian particles may be independent of form. It must be borne in mind, however, that the initial distribution of the Bohmian particles must conform to a spatial probability distribution in order to fit with the predictions of standard quantum mechanics.[50] We might think of the spatial structure of the matter, in that case, as being imposed by a form, while admitting an element of randomness in the way the particles are initially distributed within that structure. A Bohmian hylomorphist is not, I think, compelled to adopt Ockham's characterization of matter as being *intrinsically* extended.

Does prime matter have intrinsic mereological properties, however, as Scotus insisted? The Bohmian will surely have to say "yes." There is a fixed number N of particles in a Bohmian cosmos that follow continuous trajectories through space and that number is independent of the wave function. In the non-relativistic versions of GRW theory and the many worlds theory, however, the situation is not dissimilar, for both theories involve the wave function of a many-particle system. Although these theories do not admit particles that (always) have definite positions and follow (continuous) trajectories, a fixed number of "quantum particles" is posited. In GRWm theory, for example, the density profile of the matter-field is generated by smearing the mass of N quantum particles over space.

It is difficult to see how an entity that is wholly in potency could be *intrinsically* divided into parts. It seems that prime material entities, if they have intrinsic mereological properties, must be "in act" in at least some qualified sense. Nonetheless, this is not a clear win for Scotus's conception of prime matter over Aquinas's. Up to this point I have been assuming, for

[49] See Mosko and Simpson, "Whose Hylomorphism? Which Theory of Prime Matter?"

[50] For Bohmian mechanics to be empirically equivalent to standard quantum mechanics, the particle configuration must satisfy the so-called equilibrium hypothesis: Its initial probability distribution at t_o must be equal to the squared amplitude of the wave function, $\rho(t_o) = |\psi(t_o)|^2$.

the sake of simplicity, a non-relativistic framework for quantum mechanics, which lacks any mechanism for dealing with changes in particle numbers. In quantum field theory, however, particles are subject to creation and annihilation events and systems can be in superpositions of states involving different numbers of particles. Although Bohmian versions of quantum field theory have been suggested that preserve the number of particles in the Bohmian particle configuration, flash ontologies have been proposed for quantum field theories in which a fixed number of quantum particles is no longer assumed. Further work is required to extend hylomorphic versions of the primitive ontology approach to quantum field theories as well as theories of quantum gravity.

3.3 Revisiting the Substratum Objection and the Physicalist Objection

Suppose it turned out that prime matter lacked spatial, temporal, *and* mereological properties. According to the Substratum Objection, however, prime matter *must* have a positive nature that persists through time in order to underlie substantial change. Yet from our discussion it was not apparent that prime material entities must persist *per se* in order for the parts of a substance that they individuate to persist through *accidental* change. The parts might persist *per aliud* in virtue of the substance's substantial form. Is it necessary that prime matter must persist *per se* to be the substrate of *substantial* change?

Koons has proposed that facts about the persistence of prime material entities are not fundamental but grounded in facts about *both* the substantial *and* accidental forms in which these portions of prime matter are involved. The question of whether prime matter can underlie substantial change, on this view, turns on the question of whether any of the *accidents* of a substance can ever persist through substantial change. Such occurrences may in fact be more commonplace than might be supposed. If stars are thermal substances, for example, as Koons has suggested, then the photons we receive from stars that no longer exist – if they count as entities but not as substances – would involve accidental forms that survive the corruption of the original substance.

What of the Physicalist Objection, which complains that a substrate of matter without properties would make no contribution to the existence and properties of a substance? If that is the case, surely physics would have nothing to tell us about the material parts of which things are made. This seems too hasty. In the first place, if the role of matter is to *individuate* the parts of a substance, then a natural substance can have no parts without matter (nor can matter exist without anything to individuate). In

the second place, if we adopt a primitive ontology approach to physical theories, then physics *can* tell us the dynamics of prime material constituents even if they lack intrinsic physical properties. Obviously, I have only been able to scratch the surface of a discussion that has deep roots within ancient and medieval philosophy. Much more work in this area is needed. In revisiting the idea of prime matter in the light of contemporary physics, however, it may turn out the standard objections have been overstated. Perhaps it is modern microphysical atoms, rather than medieval prime matter, that have been left without any role to play.[51]

[51] The author would like to acknowledge the financial support of the Issachar Fund via the project "The Theology of Open Quantum Systems" and the Civitas Institute of the University of Texas at Austin. He would also like to thank Campion Hall, Oxford, for its hospitality during the academic year 2023–2024, and the Philosophy faculty of the University of Oxford for inviting him to be a visiting scholar during this period.

CHAPTER 4

Thomistic Epistemology
Realist, Commonsensist

Jonathan Fuqua

Should Thomists embrace commonsensism? I here argue that they should; that in fact Thomism is itself a version of commonsensism. Should commonsensists embrace Thomism? Here, things are a little more complicated. There are versions of commonsensism that aren't Thomist. Hence, commonsensism just as such doesn't require Thomism. Thomism is one way of being a commonsensist, perhaps even the best way, but it is not the only way. In this chapter, though, I won't spend much time discussing whether commonsensists should be Thomists. Rather, I shall focus on arguing for that first claim: that Thomists should be commonsensists. This argument will be rather indirect, though, for I will be arguing for their compatibility by responding to arguments for their incompatibility made by one of the twentieth century's most influential Thomists: Étienne Gilson.

The relationship between Thomism and commonsense is something that was seriously discussed by some of the greatest Thomists of the twentieth century, such as Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange. Those who are attracted to both Thomism and commonsensism might then think that by turning to these figures, or others like them, one could find a quick and definitive answer to the question of Thomism and commonsensism. Unfortunately, there is a major disagreement here, with Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange giving an affirmative reply to our question and Gilson giving a resoundingly negative answer. The objective I aim to achieve in this chapter is vindicating the "pro" answer to our question over against Gilson's "con" answer.

One might be tempted to think that one could find an answer to the question of whether Thomists should be commonsensists by consulting the works of contemporary Thomists and epistemologists, and this would be an understandable temptation. Here again, however, expectations disappoint. Most contemporary epistemologists, including those who write about commonsense, give Aquinas and the Thomist tradition little to no attention. Moreover, most contemporary Thomists seem more interested

in other areas of Thomistic philosophy, such as Thomistic metaphysics, philosophical anthropology, ethics, metaphysics, and so on, such that, by reading their works, one won't be able to find an answer to the question of Thomism and commonsensism. Finally, those who do write about Thomistic epistemology typically focus on other questions, such as whether Aquinas is an internalist or an externalist, a moderate or a classical foundationalist, his views on perceptual knowledge, questions about his religious epistemology, and how to understand the overall Thomistic view of cognition. With Thomism and commonsensism both seemingly on the rise, our question is a natural and important one to ask.

I shall proceed as follows. In Section 1, I will provide an overview of commonsensism. In Section 2, I will explain Gilson's critique of commonsense. Finally, in Section 3, I will argue that Gilson's rejection of commonsensism in the name of Thomism is misplaced and that Thomists should be commonsensists.

1 Commonsense Philosophy

I have elsewhere argued that commonsensism consists of two propositions, the Commonsense Thesis and the Transmission Thesis:

Commonsense Thesis (CT): There is a class of commonsense propositions that are known by almost all normal, cognitively mature, properly functioning human cognizers and enjoy the following epistemic status: We have more reason to believe them than we do to believe the conjunction of a philosophical skeptical argument to the contrary.

Transmission Thesis (TT): In virtue of CT, we can use our knowledge of these commonsense propositions to provide a rational basis for rejecting (conjunctions of) skeptical premises.[1]

The basic idea here is that commonsense propositions are epistemically superior to skeptical alternatives and thus that we can use our knowledge or justified belief in the former to reject the latter.

It is important to note here that the anti-skeptical powers of our commonsense beliefs stem from the fact that we have much more reason or justification to believe commonsense propositions than we do to believe skeptical ones, and not from the mere fact that commonsense beliefs are widespread, if not universal. As Maritain points out, "Philosophy cannot, as the Scottish school maintained, be founded on the authority of common

[1] Jonathan Fuqua, "An Ecumenical Mooreanism," *Philosophia* 49 (2021): 2019–2040, at 2024.

sense understood simply as the common consent or universal witness of mankind, or as an instinct which in fact compels our assent. For it is in fact founded on evidence, not on authority of any kind."[2]

Having said that, as Justin McBrayer has recently argued, knowledge that others believe some proposition *p* does provide us with reason to believe *p*. This is one instance of the more general fact that the higher-order facts consisting of others' beliefs about *p* is epistemically relevant information that can boost or detract from the grounds I already have that bear on *p*.[3] Thus, the ubiquity of commonsense truths would count as some evidence in their favor. So, Maritain is half-right: Ubiquity alone does not establish the stalwart epistemic status of commonsense, but it does contribute to it.

What sorts of things count as items of commonsense? Stephen Boulter has a helpful list of examples, one culled from the works of Reid and Moore:

1. There are in the universe an enormous number of material objects (e.g. our bodies, other people, animals, plants, stones, mountains, rivers, seas, planets, tables, chairs, etc.).
2. Human beings have minds inasmuch as we have a variety of mental states, including acts of consciousness. We see, hear, feel, remember, imagine, think, believe, desire, dislike, will, love, and so on.
3. Material objects can and do exist when we are not conscious of them.
4. My well-functioning memory is reliable if not infallible when concerned with recent events.
5. By attentive reflection, a man can have a clear and certain knowledge of the operations of his own mind.
6. Moral judgments are true or false.[4]

[2] Jacques Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1931), 136.

[3] See Justin McBrayer, "Everybody Else Is Thinking It, So Why Can't We?" *Synthese* 198 (2021): 1271–1287. McBrayer is here following Reid, though not self-consciously; Reid says:

> We ought likewise to take for granted, as first principles, things wherein we find an universal agreement, among the learned and unlearned, in the different nations and ages of the world. A consent of ages and nations, of the learned and vulgar, ought, at least, to have great authority, unless we can show some prejudice, as universal as that consent is, which might be the cause of it. Truth is one, but error is infinite. (Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), essay I, ch. 2, 44)

[4] This list of (1)–(6) is a partial compilation from Stephen Boulter's *The Rediscovery of Common Sense Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29–30, where Boulter gives a list of eighteen examples of commonsense truths. I mention (1)–(6) in my "An Ecumenical Mooreanism," 2025.

Boulter notes that it is also part of commonsense to say that we know propositions like (1)–(6). Examples of commonsense are not difficult to multiply:

7. Dogs are not made of glass.
8. I have hands.
9. There are other human beings.
10. Rocks cannot do calculus.
11. Nothing can be a square and a circle.
12. Newborns cannot run marathons.[5]

We could keep going, but we do not need to, though I will make one additional note, which is that I and others have argued that the commonsense tradition's examples of commonsense truths should be extended to include basic moral truths, such as that it is wrong to engage in recreational genocide; call this extension "moral commonsensism."[6] Allow me, if you will, a few remarks on these commonsense truths and our knowledge of them.

First, though commonsense truths are often widespread, indeed nearly universal, that is not strictly necessary. My existence is an item of commonsense for me, but my existence is not a worldwide piece of knowledge; it is not something "everyone knows."[7] Second, commonsense truths are often taken for granted and thus are not always, or even often, explicitly

[5] I mention (7)–(12) in my "Ecumenical Mooreanism," 2025–2026.

[6] See my "Ethical Mooreanism," *Synthese* 199 (2021): 6943–6965 and "Metaethical Mooreanism and Evolutionary Debunking," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 92 (2018): 271–284. See also Boulter, *The Rediscovery*, 177–197; Terence Cuneo, "Reidian Metaethics: Part II," *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011): 341–349; Noah Lemos, "Morality and Common Sense," in *The Cambridge Companion to Common-Sense Philosophy*, ed. Rik Peels and Rene van Woudenberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 265–286; William Lycan, "Can a Moral Judgment Be Moorean?" in *The Oxford Handbook of Moral Realism*, ed. Paul Bloomfield and David Copp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 156–172. This extension has roots in the commonsense tradition; it's just that this is typically ignored by many philosophers today. Reid, for instance, makes the following remarks about moral commonsense:

> There are also first principles in morals. That an unjust action has more demerit than an ungenerous one: That a generous action has more merit than a merely just one: That no man ought to be blamed for what it was not in his power to hinder: That we ought not to do to others what we would think unjust or unfair to be done to us in like circumstances: These are moral axioms, and many others might be named which appear to me to have no less evidence than those of mathematics. (Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, essay VI, ch. 6, 494)

[7] Nonetheless, commonsense truths are usually widespread, if not universal. Maritain provides a Thomistic explanation for this: "Since their source is human nature itself, they will be found in all men alike; in other words, they are common to all men. They may therefore be said to belong to the common perception, consent, or instinct, or to the common sense of mankind." See his *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 134.

acknowledged: They are so obvious that, in many cases, mentioning them would be redundant, if not weird: You might talk to people about whether you believe in God, but not about whether your mother could turn into a bottle of ketchup. Third, commonsense propositions are often known basically, or non-inferentially, but that doesn't preclude the possibility of having some inferential commonsense knowledge. Maritain includes "consequences immediately deducible" from "self-evident axioms" as among the items of commonsense.[8] Fourth, commonsense truths can be argued for, though this isn't necessary to know them or justifiably believe them: There is a difference between having a justified belief that *p* and justifying my belief that *p*, where the latter but not the former is necessarily a matter of discursive reasoning. The reason that commonsense propositions don't need to be argued for is that they are more obviously true than any set of premises we could give on their behalf. Finally, commonsense propositions as understood by philosophers in the commonsense tradition can include propositions that are more properly philosophical, such as the correspondence theory of truth,[9] but typically don't concern (i) culturally relative truisms, (ii) propositions about the inner workings of the natural order (this being the sort of thing investigated by the natural sciences), or (iii) practical know-how pieces of knowledge, such as knowing how to change a tire or balance your checkbook. Thus, no one could know that water = H_2O as a matter of commonsense, nor would the fact that you are "supposed to" eat turkey on Thanksgiving count as an item of commonsense, this latter being an example of a culturally relative truism.[10]

Commonsensism is standardly understood to have metaphilosophical implications. Indeed, some have even understood it as a metaphilosophy.[11] These implications are, to my mind, twofold. Negatively, we can say that philosophical theorizing must at the least respect the deliverances of commonsense. As Boulter puts it, "Now the principal contention of common sense philosophy is that any philosophical argument, thesis or system which is inconsistent with any of this set of beliefs is almost

[8] Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 134.

[9] Boulter argues that the correspondence theory of truth is the commonsense view of truth; see his *Why Medieval Philosophy Matters* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 31–35.

[10] For more on commonsensism, see my "An Ecumenical Mooreanism." Three excellent monographs on the topic are Boulter's *The Rediscovery*, Noah Lemos's *Common Sense: A Contemporary Defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Nicholas Rescher's *Common Sense: A New Look at an Old Philosophical Tradition* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2005).

[11] See Edward Madden, "The Metaphilosophy of Commonsense," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983): 23–36.

certainly wrong, and so no lasting philosophical achievement is to be expected if these beliefs are not accommodated."[12]

Thus, when commonsense philosophers are considering a philosophical theory that winds up contradicting commonsense, they regard this as a *reductio* on that theory and "go back" to try to find out where the theory went wrong. Thus, if you have an epistemological theory according to which we are unable to know or justifiably believe that there is an external world, then there is something wrong with your theory. Rather than doubting our knowledge of the external world, we should find the dubious but seemingly plausible premise, implicit or explicit, in the skeptical epistemology, reject it, and find a better epistemology.[13]

Positively, commonsense philosophers regard their job as one of fleshing out the philosophy that is implicit in the commonsense view of the world. As the Harvard philosopher John Wild put it in 1948, "all men are philosophers and . . . the academic discipline [of philosophy] exists solely for the purpose of purifying and refining that natural philosophy of the common man which is a necessary part of human life."[14] Thus, for example, when considering the problem of change, commonsense has it that the middle-sized objects of ordinary perceptual experience, which are objects of knowledge, often change without ceasing to exist. Philosophers in the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition formulate and defend a metaphysical system that explains this commonsense knowledge, one that includes elements like essentialism, hylomorphism, and the act–potency distinction. While operating in the positive vein, commonsense philosophers don't *stop* with commonsense – for then they wouldn't be doing philosophy – but they take it that the implicit philosophy of the commonsense view of the world is on the right track, and thus they attempt to render this philosophy explicit and to develop it into a proper philosophical theory.

Certainly, more could be said about commonsense philosophy; I hope I have said enough about it to justify moving on to consider the

[12] Boulter, *Why Medieval Philosophy Matters*, 30.

[13] As John Greco notes, this is how consideration of skeptical arguments can actually help to drive positive epistemology. We should take the skeptic seriously, not because we ought to be worried that skepticism might be right after all, but rather because doing so can teach us valuable lessons about knowledge. See Greco's *Putting Skeptics in Their Place: The Nature of Skeptical Arguments and Their Role in Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1–24.

[14] John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 3. Wild, perhaps like the famous Thomists mentioned in this chapter, is probably unknown to most contemporary philosophers. He died in 1972 after a long and distinguished philosophical career at Yale, Harvard, and Northwestern University, and was for a time president of the American Philosophical Association.

relationship between Thomism and commonsensism. In the next section we will consider Gilson's critique of commonsense. Then, in the chapter's third and final section I will respond to Gilson and argue that Thomists should be commonsensists, an argument that is largely indirect inasmuch as I will be focusing on knocking down Gilson's arguments against commonsensism. Note that I will not be here defending either Thomism or commonsensism, though I think both are generally correct. The investigation here is limited to a discussion of their compatibility.

2 Gilson's Critique of Commonsense

The discussion about Thomism and commonsense that one finds in the works of Gilson, Maritain, Garrigou-Lagrange, and other twentieth-century philosophers was not conducted in the language of contemporary analytic epistemology, nor could it have been. Nonetheless, with a little patience and charity, the epistemological issues at play in the earlier Thomistic discussion can readily be understood by those who are familiar with contemporary epistemology. Gilson discusses these issues mainly in two books dedicated to Thomistic epistemology, both written in the 1930s: his *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginning Realists* and *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*.[15] A later twentieth-century disciple of Gilson's, Frederick Wilhelmsen, provided an updated statement of Gilsonian Thomist epistemology in his 1956 book, *Man's Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology*. Wilhelmsen's exposition is, to my mind, clearer than Gilson's, and so I will often make use of it in explaining Gilson's version of Thomist epistemology.[16]

The discussion of these issues by this cast of characters and their interlocutors is put in terms of *realism*, with Thomism being viewed as one version of the realist school of philosophy. Let us begin, then, with realism itself. According to the aforementioned Wild, realism is a school of philosophy with three main doctrines: "(1) There is a world of real existence which men have not made or constructed; (2) this real existence can be known by the human mind; and (3) such knowledge is the only reliable

[15] Étienne Gilson, *Methodical Realism: A Handbook for Beginning Realists*, trans. Philip Trower (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011) and *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge*, trans. Mark Wauck (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012). *Methodical Realism* was first published in 1935, *Thomist Realism* in 1939.

[16] Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology* (Brooklyn, NY: Angelico Press, 2021). The 2021 Angelico Press edition is a reprint of the 1956 edition, originally published by Prentice-Hall.

guide to human conduct, individual and social."[17] According to Wild, these three doctrines give rise to the three main branches of philosophy: metaphysics and philosophy of nature are based on (1), epistemology is based on (2), and "individual and social ethics" are based on (3).[18] Realistic philosophy, on Wild's view, is based on commonsense, but it goes beyond it (without going against it) in several ways. Commonsense can be vague and confused, whereas realistic philosophy "precisely formulates these principles, analyzes their component concepts, and examines them in the light of the evidence." Commonsense doesn't typically tease out the consequences of (1)–(3), whereas realistic philosophy discovers "many . . . implications and systematic connections." Finally, commonsense by itself is insufficient to defend (1)–(3), hence naïve adherents to commonsense can be unwittingly led away from it; realistic philosophy, on the other hand, "is able to undertake the arduous task of defending these insights against alien ways of thought and of answering critical questions."[19]

Although he noted that Aquinas's thought contains "certain imperfections," Wild did readily admit that the "philosophical parts" of Aquinas's works "constitute the most complete and accurate account of realistic thought that has been so far achieved."[20] Wild did not, however, say that Aristotelianism or Thomism are the only realist options. Wild, for instance, clearly thought of Plato as a realist philosopher as well. In fact, Wild seems to have thought that the vast bulk of the premodern tradition was realist. Wild blames Duns Scotus and Ockham for initiating "non-realistic modes of thought" that eventuated with the "new philosophy" of "Descartes and his followers."[21] Thus, for Wild, modern philosophy can be characterized in part by its rejection of realistic philosophy.

Gilson has a somewhat narrower view of realism, and it is best understood by contrasting it with the Cartesian metaphilosophy. The Cartesian metaphilosophy, in turn, can best be understood by considering how it answers the following questions, posed by Joseph Owens: "Is the starting point [for philosophy] something that has existence only in the activity of the percipient or knower, for instance in sensations or ideas? Or is it something that has real existence outside the cognitive agent, such as the things in the sensible universe?"[22] Wilhelmsen summarizes the Cartesian

[17] Wild, *An Introduction*, 6. [18] Wild, *An Introduction*, 7. [19] Wild, *An Introduction*, 7.
[20] Wild, *An Introduction*, 26. [21] Wild, *An Introduction*, 27, 29.
[22] Joseph Owens, *Cognition: An Epistemological Inquiry* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1992), 22.

metaphilosophy's answer to this query and the problem that that answer gives rise to in the following passage, which is worth quoting in full:

> The Cartesian critique moves from the existence of the self as a thinking principle to the existence of God, and from both of them, to the existence of the material order. The certitude I possess about things is dependent on the certitude I possess about myself as a thinking principle … The issue is Descartes' insistence that philosophy must begin *in* and *from* the mind and proceed to things; that the first unshakeable truth known to man is the existence of himself as a thinking principle; that everything else known to man is dependent on this first of truths; and that, consequently, whatever is known about the world is critically dependent on what is first known about one's own knowing. If a man accepts Descartes' initial principle, he is forced immediately to ask the following question: If I am philosophically – that is, critically – certain of only one thing at the outset of my philosophizing, and if this one thing is the existence of myself as a thinking principle, then how am I able (if I am able at all) to move from this primitive certitude to a knowledge of other things, and, most especially, to a knowledge of the existence of the extra-mental world, of things existing independently of own understanding? This is the famous "critical problem" that has plagued thinkers since the time of Descartes.[23]

Gilson maintains that any philosophy that makes world-knowledge dependent on self-knowledge in this fashion is a version of methodological idealism. Thus, in his view, though Descartes was "in intention a realist," he was "an idealist in method."[24] Idealism so understood may be contrasted with realism, which "does not start from the self" but rather starts with "the world" as a "thing-in-itself" of which we have knowledge, and "knowledge implies a something beyond thought."[25] Wilhelmsen argues the idealist method gives rise to the "critical problem": Can I move from knowledge of my mind to knowledge of things outside the mind? Critical philosophy is a metaphilosophy – essentially, the Cartesian/idealist one – according to which philosophy must begin with the critical problem and resolve it before moving on. According to the "critical philosophers," the "mind must begin by reflecting on its own operations."[26] Noncritical philosophy, or metaphysical realism, on the other hand, is the view that philosophy should begin "with things, with being"; the "first and ultimate principle and truth of philosophy is the judgment, 'Being is.'"[27] Although Descartes, Berkeley, and

[23] Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 13–14. [24] Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, 12.
[25] Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, 95. [26] Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 14.
[27] Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 15. He explains the phrase "metaphysical realism" as follows: "We call this school of thought 'metaphysical realism'; *realism*, because it holds to the real existence of things in independence of men's thinking or knowing them; *metaphysical*, because it holds that this truth is the first and ultimate principle of philosophy, a truth independent of any critique of knowledge."

Kant all have their own version of the critical philosophy, these critical philosophers agree on the following: (i) philosophy begins with an examination of the mind, not with things; (ii) philosophy cannot justifiably move to examine things until it has rationally demonstrated the reliability of human cognition; and (iii) the realist position dogmatically assumes the reality of external things.[28]

For Gilson (and Wilhelmsen too), the critical problem is really a "pseudoproblem" because "realism starts with . . . an act of the intellect which consists essentially in grasping an object, for the realist the question does not present an insoluble problem, but a pseudoproblem, which is something quite different."[29] According to the metaphysical realist school, there is real knowledge of things prior to philosophizing, knowledge that critical philosophers abstract away from when they engage in the critical project.[30] That Gilson holds this view of the critical problem helps to explain the scorn he heaps on "critical realism," which is essentially the Cartesian attempt to reach a realist metaphysics by beginning with the idealist method.[31] According to critical realism, philosophy, as a science, has to start with the mind and has to validate the mind's ability to know external reality before moving on to other parts of philosophy. Gilsonian criticisms of critical realism, boiled down to their essentials, are twofold. First, Gilson and company argue that if you start with the mind alone, you'll never get outside of it to the external world, and hence you'll never know that world; for Gilson, "this is the principal reason for not being an idealist."[32] Second, they argue that critical philosophy gets the relevant facts wrong: We don't see, as the "copy theory"[33] has it, little photos in our mind and then infer that the things those photos represent existing things; rather, we directly perceive those things themselves. As Owens puts it,

> The fact is that observable things other than our cognitive activities, things such as stones, trees, animals and human bodies, are directly present to our awareness while the cognitive activity and oneself as agent are perceived only reflexively in the awareness of something else. This would indicate a definite epistemological priority for those other objects. It is upon them that perception originally focuses.[34]

[28] Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 19–20. [29] Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, 94.
[30] Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 26–27.
[31] A large chunk of Gilson's *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* is taken up with a series of criticisms of various versions of critical realism.
[32] Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, 94.
[33] This is Wilhelmsen's preferred phraseology; see *Man's Knowledge*, 77.
[34] Owens, *Cognition*, 47.

Gilson therefore sees critical realism as an incoherent position. Insofar as it wants to take the external world for granted and be realist, it is insufficiently critical; and insofar as it wants to be sufficiently critical and adopt the idealist method, it will never reach the external reality that it takes for granted.[35]

We are now in a position to understand Gilson's critique of the commonsense tradition. Gilson essentially sees three possible versions of realism in general: classical realism, critical realism, and naïve realism. We have already discussed the Gilsonian rejection of critical realism. Classical realism can be understood as the conjunction of Wild's (1)–(3) and Gilson's Thomistic philosophy of knowledge, which includes (4) a direct realist view of perceptual knowledge and (5) the Aristotelian-Thomistic account of human cognition in general, including items such as the distinction between sensory cognition and intellectual cognition, the five external senses, the four internal senses, the intentional reception of form in sensory perception, the active and passive intellect, abstraction, the three acts of reason, the distinction between the speculative intellect and the practical intellect, the various intellectual virtues, and so on and so forth.[36] Gilson considers commonsensism to be a naïve realism, and he lobs a number of philosophical grenades in its direction.

First, he argues that Aquinas's only explicit discussion of "common sense" is a discussion of the "faculty" of common sense, an internal sense that (among other things) unifies the data provided by the five external senses, thus allowing us to have unified perceptual experiences of external, sensible realities.[37]

Second, Gilson notes that Aquinas does accept Aristotle's view that "every proof presupposes certain evident principles that are themselves indemonstrable" – what Gilson calls "common conceptions" – but he does

[35] See Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 149–170.

[36] This is not the place to even try and provide an overview of the Thomistic account of cognition in general. For book-length treatments, see Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*; Owens, *Cognition*; and Steven Jensen, *The Human Person: A Beginner's Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018). For more recent, and shorter, treatments, see Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 217–276 and Therese Cory, "The Nature of Cognition and Knowledge," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, ed. Eleonore Stump and Thomas White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 153–183. For a book-length treatment of Aquinas on perception, see Anthony Lisska, *Aquinas's Theory of Perception: An Analytic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[37] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 35–36. For a brief discussion of the four internal senses, including the common sense, by Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 68, art. 4. For a more extended discussion of the common sense, see *In De Anima*, bk. 2, lec. 13, n. 390; bk. 2, lec. 25, nn. 575–578; bk. 2, lec. 27, nn. 601–614.

not regard this as sufficient reason to think that Aquinas was endorsing the commonsensism of Reid.[38] For one thing, notes Gilson, Aquinas does not adopt the Reidian view that the common sense is a "faculty attributable to reason."[39] Aquinas's rational faculty includes the speculative intellect and the practical intellect; there is no room for a "new faculty," as Gilson puts it. Aquinas's *communes conceptiones*, moreover, "are simply judgments formulated by reason in the light of the principle of contradiction."[40] It's not entirely clear what bearing this has on commonsensism, but it's not hard to guess: Reid's examples of commonsense include propositions that are true even though it's not true, of them, that they are that "in which the predicate belongs to the account of the subject."[41] Reid, for instance, takes it as a first principle of commonsense "That those things did really happen which I distinctly remember,"[42] yet it is clear that this contingent truth does not fall into the category of propositions "in which the predicate belongs to the account of the subject." Thus, Aquinas's *communes conceptiones* and Reid's first principles of commonsense are not the same (which is not to say there couldn't be overlap). As Gilson puts the point, "everything which is part of common sense is not necessarily a common conception."[43]

Third, Gilson points out that in Garrigou-Lagrange's discussion of the matter, he is "unable to find a single text from Aristotle or the great scholastics to cite in favor of common sense." Gilson finds it preposterous to think that the scholastics failed to realize that "their philosophy had always been the philosophy of common sense" until "after they had read Reid."[44] Fourth, Gilson poses a dilemma for Reidian Thomists: Either the faculty of common sense is an "unjustified and unjustifiable instinct, which will destroy Thomism" or it is reducible to "the Thomist intellect and reason," in which case it is unmotivated.[45] Fifth, Gilson wonders why, if

[38] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 37. For Aquinas's endorsement of the idea that we have immediate or non-inferential knowledge ("indemonstrable") of the self-evident first principles required by demonstration, see *In Metaphysics*, bk. 3, lec. 5, n. 389. See also his *In De Hebdomadibus*, lec. 1, nn. 12–18, where Aquinas is very explicit about the necessity of our knowing the common conceptions immediately, lest we fall into an infinite regress.

[39] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 39. [40] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 39.

[41] Aquinas, *In De Hebdomadibus*, lec. 1, n. 18. Quotations from Aquinas's *In De Hebdomadibus* are from the translation by Peter King, edited by the Aquinas Institute, available at https://aquinas.cc/la/en/~DeHeb.L1.34.

[42] Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers*, essay VI, ch. 5, 474. [43] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 44.

[44] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 41fn22. Garrigou-Lagrange's Thomistic commonsense views can be found in his *Thomistic Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and the Development of Doctrine*, trans. Matthew Minerd (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021).

[45] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 44.

common sense is truly universal, philosophers like Berkeley and Fichte were "deprived of it."[46] Sixth, Gilson argues that "if it is philosophy, realism cannot be naïve."[47] In Gilson's own verdict on commonsensism, he doesn't mince words:

> In short, there can be no middle ground between Reid and St. Thomas . . . Common sense was a poor ally, a cause of weakness to the philosophy which attempted to establish a firm foundation upon it, and its inadequacies became apparent when those who relied upon it tried to use it to prove the existence of the external world.[48]

In the next and final section, I will argue that Gilson's Thomistic critiques of commonsensism fail, and that Thomists should be commonsensists.

3 Thomism and Commonsense

Gilson's criticisms of commonsensism do not work, as the following point-by-point response will show. First, commonsensism doesn't require adopting Reid's own faculty psychology, or any faculty psychology for that matter. Gilson may give us a (Thomistic) reason to doubt that we have a Reidian faculty of common sense, but that does nothing to touch the doctrine of commonsensism, which is the conjunction of CT and TT along with their metaphilosophical implications (as outlined in Section 1). The core idea of commonsensism is that radically skeptical (e.g. you don't know you have hands) and radically revisionary (e.g. change is an illusion) philosophical theories are epistemically inferior to the truths of commonsense, which we in fact know. This has the metaphilosophical implication that good philosophy doesn't run afoul of commonsense. This is precisely the sort of view one finds in the Thomists who do endorse commonsense. Maritain, for instance, argues that "Ordinary knowledge" implies a "solid kernel of genuine certainties," such as those provided by the "data of the senses," "self-evident axioms," and what follows from these, and that this ordinary commonsense knowledge is something we are obligated to "begin with" and to "be content with . . . to the end."[49] Garrigou-Lagrange concurs: "This traditional philosophy, the work of centuries, is at its foundation nothing other than a perpetual justification of the solutions offered by common sense."[50] Gilson himself, in spite of himself, would also

[46] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 46. [47] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 52.
[48] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 44–45. [49] Maritain, *Introduction to Philosophy*, 133–134.
[50] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Thomistic Common Sense*, 92.

appear to implicitly concur with this defense of commonsense. Gilson says quite explicitly that the main reason to reject idealism is that it implies that we could never have knowledge of the external world.[51] Moreover, the Gilsonian Thomistic position on our epistemic relationship to the external world is that we directly perceive it and that it is *evident* that it exists, and thus that we know it exists, and thus that there is no need to prove that it exists; that is, to answer the critical problem.[52]

Second, the fact that Reid and Aquinas do not share the exact same list of commonsense truths is not a reason to reject commonsensism. Commonsensists differ about many things, including, at times, what to include in the category of commonsense. They differ about other things as well, such as whether to adopt internalism or externalism, or the sensitivity condition on knowledge or the safety condition on knowledge, whether seemings justify or not, and so on.[53] Perhaps Thomists and Reidians just have different versions of the commonsense philosophy. In any case, there is no list of commonsense truths in Aquinas in the way that there is in Reid, but nor is there a reason to think that Aquinas would have rejected many of the items on Reid's list, nor is there a reason for Thomists, qua Thomists, to reject these items either. The list of commonsense propositions (1)–(12) above seems unimpeachable from a Thomistic perspective. In any case, Thomists certainly do not object to the idea of the development of philosophical doctrine, and so perhaps Thomism's commonsensism can be developed by engaging with the likes of Reid, Moore, and other commonsense philosophers.

Third, the fact that Garrigou-Lagrange and other proponents of Thomistic common sense do not have proof texts from Aquinas for an explicit form of commonsensism is not a good reason to reject commonsensism. For one thing, if commonsensism is true, then Thomists should adopt it, whether proof texts in its favor exist in the Aquinian corpus or not. For another, the doctrine of commonsense is, arguably, largely implicit in Aquinas's philosophy, and it can be made explicit as a self-conscious development of the Thomistic tradition. Finally, we should note that the historical context in which commonsensism became an explicit and significant topic of philosophical conversation was one in which the theretofore largely unnoticed truths of commonsense were coming under fire from revisionary epistemology and metaphysics. In this context, it is not

[51] Gilson, *Methodical Realism*, 94.
[52] See Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge*, 28–29 and Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 180.
[53] For discussion of all this, see my "An Ecumenical Mooreanism."

surprising that realist philosophers, who had always relied on commonsense, if only implicitly, now had to openly talk about and defend the teachings of commonsense in a mode and manner that was unnecessary in the thirteenth century, especially for a Dominican friar such as Aquinas. As Stump points out, Aquinas was more concerned with explaining how we acquire knowledge than he was with rebutting skeptical arguments; this is largely because there is not much, if any, room for skepticism to arise from within his worldview.[54] Thus, it isn't surprising, given these facts, that there is little to no explicit discussion of a doctrine of commonsense in the Aquinian corpus.

Fourth, recall Gilson's dilemma for Reidian Thomists: Either the faculty of commonsense is an "unjustified instinct" or is reducible to the faculty of reason. This criticism seems directed at the Reidian faculty psychology, and we have already seen that this is not an essential feature of commonsensism as such, and thus that Thomistic commonsensists are free to reject it. Fifth, in reply to Gilson's complaint that commonsensism is unable to account for the absence of commonsense in the likes of Berkeley and Fichte, this would be like saying that the presence of colorblind people shows that the proper object of sight isn't color. Our grasp of virtually any principle or aspect of reality can be obscured by any of a variety of factors, including vice, cognitive malfunction, being in the grip of a bad but seductive theory, and so forth; this hardly shows that human beings are not the sort of substances that, by nature, when properly developed and properly functioning, easily and naturally grasp certain truths, such as (1)–(12). In fact, Thomists have a good reason for expecting human cognition to be very reliable and thus likely to produce trustworthy results that can be relied upon in philosophical theorizing. As Stump points out, Aquinas's worldview is theistic and includes the doctrine that human beings are made in God's image and are given, by God, a suite of cognitive faculties with a divine design plan so that they can carry out their mission as rational beings to know and love God and others.[55] To note this is not to fall into the Cartesian or "critical" trap of thinking that our beliefs about external realities aren't justified and/or suitable for use in inquiry unless we have solved the critical problem of first verifying the reliability of our cognitive faculties. It is simply to note that the perspective of the larger Thomistic worldview is one on which human beings should be expected to be capable

[54] Stump, *Aquinas*, 236–237.

[55] Stump, *Aquinas*, 236–237. Stump essentially argues for a theistic proper functionalist interpretation of Aquinas's epistemology.

of acquiring large quantities of ordinary knowledge about themselves and the world they inhabit.

Gilson's sixth critique was that realistic philosophy shouldn't rely on naïve commonsense. What could this mean? Here is one possibility: Gilson seems to think that commonsense thinkers want to substitute commonsense for philosophy. Maybe this was true of certain thinkers in the commonsense tradition. Garrigou-Lagrange leveled a similar critique at what he called "Scottish philosophy," which, on his view, "remains in accord with common sense solely by the fact that it refuses ... to go beyond it."[56] However, Garrigou-Lagrange also noted that there is a "learned speculation" that "succeeds at rejoining common sense," which he calls the "traditional philosophy" and the *perennis philosophia*.[57] Commonsensism, we should happily admit, is not a full-orbed philosophy, like Platonism or Aristotelianism. Rather, it consists of the epistemological theses of CT and TT, along with their metaphilosophical implications. If it helps Gilsonians, they can think of it as a partial metaphilosophy, based on a pair of sound epistemological principles; that is, CT and TT. Commonsensism instructs us to respect the truths of commonsense but also, as a metaphilosophy, to build on them and thus, in a way, to transcend them without violating them.

Another interpretation of the naïveté worry is that, according to Gilson, the commonsense attempt to prove the existence of the external world was a failure, and thus for realists to build on this foundation would be to build their house on sand. But this criticism just fails to take notice of the fact that commonsense philosophers do not try to prove the existence of the external world at all; rather, they take our knowledge of external realities to be properly basic; that is, properly non-inferential. As John Greco argues, self-consciously building on the work of Reid and Moore, we should not try to prove that which is not known by proof. And for Greco – again, building self-consciously on Reid and Moore – "We know that external things exist by perceiving them, and therefore skeptics are misguided in wanting a proof in the first place."[58] This version of the naivete worry, then, simply fails to really engage with the commonsense perspective at all.

Gilson, then, doesn't give us any good Thomistic reasons to reject commonsense. Moreover, he overlooks some fairly obvious possible points of contact between the two traditions. I will close this chapter by noting two of these. First, he overlooks the theistic point made above: Thomists,

[56] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Thomistic Common Sense*, 88–89.
[57] Garrigou-Lagrange, *Thomistic Common Sense*, 88–89, 92.
[58] John Greco, "How to Reid Moore," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52 (2002): 544–563, at 546.

as theists, should expect ordinary human cognition to be reliable and thus to be capable of producing a trustworthy fund of human knowledge that is useful in everyday life and also serviceable in rigorous inquiry. This ordinary knowledge can't substitute for philosophy, but it can serve as a boundary marker for it. Gilson himself seems to acknowledge this. He writes,

> I will certainly not deny the existence or the widespread acceptance of these spontaneous convictions, nor will I contest either their rhetorical and persuasive value or the considerable importance which their existence holds for philosophy. The general characteristics of these certitudes are their relative universality, their stability and their persistence. I would not even care to deny that . . . the belief of all men is an indication of or an argument for the truth.[59]

Given Gilson's Thomistic, and thus theistic, worldview, there is no reason he cannot accept Maritain's view that the scientific knowledge of philosophy exceeds in perfection the "pre-scientific stage of the same knowledge," yet which knowledge it is bound to respect.[60]

Second, Gilson and commonsensists alike, as noted above, agree in holding that our knowledge of the external world doesn't depend on our first having a philosophical proof that our cognitive faculties are reliable. Thus, commonsensists, along with Gilson, reject the critical problem as a pseudoproblem. Moreover, since we *know* that the external world exists, we can use this knowledge to reject theories that jeopardize this knowledge. Gilson does precisely this when he uses our knowledge of external realities to reject methodical idealism on the grounds that it would make external world-knowledge impossible. Gilson's move here is similar to Moore's proof of the external world, in which Moore reasoned from his knowledge of his hands to his knowledge of the external world.[61] Properly interpreted, Moore – tongue in cheek – was really arguing from his commonsense knowledge of the world to a rejection of revisionary philosophical theories that say otherwise.[62] Moore makes this line of thought more explicit in the following passage:

> What I want, however, finally to emphasize is this: Russell's view that I do not know for certain that this is a pencil or that you are conscious rests, if I am right, on no less than four distinct assumptions: (1) That I don't know

[59] Gilson, *Thomist Realism*, 41–42. [60] Maritain, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 137.
[61] See G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," in *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Collier, 1962), 126–148.
[62] For this reading of Moore, see Greco, "How to Reid Moore."

> these things immediately; (2) That they don't follow logically from any thing or things that I do know immediately; (3) That, if (1) and (2) are true, my belief in or knowledge of them must be "based on an analogical or inductive argument"; and (4) That what is so based cannot be certain knowledge. And what I can't help asking, myself is this: Is it, in fact, as certain that all these four assumptions are true, as that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious? I cannot help answering: It seems to me more certain that I do know that this is a pencil and that you are conscious, than that any single one of these four assumptions is true, let alone all four.[63]

The similarity between Moore's commonsense dismissal of Russell's skepticism and Gilson's realist dismissal of methodical idealism is patent, and both are recognizable as anti-skeptical moves made by two different thinkers who belong to the same broad tent of commonsense philosophy.

4 Conclusion

I haven't given an argument for Thomism. Nor have I given an argument for commonsensism. And my argument for their compatibility has been largely indirect, for it has proceeded by way of shooting down Gilson's criticisms of commonsense philosophy. In spite of this chapter's limitations, however, I think – if I have been successful – that I have done something worth doing: I have shown that the dismissal of commonsensism by one of the most important Thomists of the twentieth century was misguided. This gives us some reason for an affirmative answer to the chapter's main question: Yes, Thomists can and should be commonsensists.

[63] G. E. Moore, "Four Forms of Skepticism," in *Philosophical Papers*, 221.

CHAPTER 5

Aquinas on Personhood
With Notes to the Postmodern Conscience

Caitlin Smith Gilson

If the soul of itself knows itself in its essence, every man, having a soul, knows the essence of the soul: which clearly is not the case, for many men have thought the soul to be this or that body, and some have taken it for a number or harmony. So then, by knowing itself, the soul is led to know concerning separately subsistent intelligences the fact of their existence, but not what they are essentially, which would mean understanding their substances. For whereas we know, either by demonstration or by faith, concerning these pure spirits that they are intelligent subsistent beings, in neither way could we gather this knowledge but for the fact that our soul knows from itself the meaning of intelligent being. Hence we must use our knowledge of the intelligence of our own soul as a starting-point for all that we can know of separately subsistent intelligences. But even granting that by speculative sciences we could arrive at a knowledge of the essence of our own soul, it does not follow that we could thereby arrive at a knowledge of all that is knowable about pure spirits, for our intelligence falls far short of the intelligence of a pure spirit. A knowledge of the essence of our own soul might lead to a knowledge of some remote higher genus of pure spirits: but that would not be an understanding of their substances.[1]

Personhood, for Aquinas, functions on the paradoxical structure of the soul's incompleteness and completeness. The soul is an incomplete part absent the specific human body, and yet if the soul were *only* an incomplete part, it could not function as the substantial form of the body and thus as its guiding principle *as consciousness*. It appears that Aquinas is placing us in a dialogic tension, a metaphysical gray area. To emphasize that the soul is the substantial form of the body as its formal aspect casts a revaluation of the unity of the body and soul as to whether this relationship benefits the soul. As substantial form of the body, the soul must be a substance in its

[1] St. Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles* lib. 3, cap. 46.

own right and thus be able in some respect to stand distinct and without the need or aid of the body.[2] On the other hand, because the soul's substance is to be the active or animating principle of the body, then structurally, the soul needs the body to find its own perfection and to be in the activity of its perfection. It is a danger to speak of the soul as "intellectual" in its separated status and "taking on" the activities of sensible powers when united to the body. These expressions promote an ontological indifference as to the soul's status – that it could either be embodied and thus take on sensible activity or be separate, unmixed, and intellectual. Still, there is that degree of self-presence to the human soul as substantial form that must be elucidated to avoid the trappings of a Cartesian mind, of an inauthentic separation of the relationship between the soul and body, split in its identity. As Aquinas remarks in the *De Veritate* qu. 10, art. 8: "before the mind abstracts from phantasms, it has habitual knowledge of itself, by which it can perceive that it exists."[3]

This chapter will address how this Thomistic ontological tension at the heart of the human person is more receptive of, and in more decisive confrontation with, postmodern views of personhood that fail to achieve coherence and consistency, often due to rejections of manufactured unity and then because of the epistemological crisis rooted in long-discarded and devastated metaphysical foundations. The dignity of the human person necessitates an open nature understood in Aquinas, and sensed in postmodern weak theological and poetic thought, but one metaphysically decisive and real that does not fall into a taxonomy of cultural and social conventions.

The human person cannot know himself without God – personhood separate from divine *To Be* is a strangulated nihilation so much so for Aquinas, God prepossesses Himself in all perfections.[4] All we own is our own nothingness. This is the radical gravitational pull wherein all of

[2] Anton Charles Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 39–40: "For the soul is not only substance and form but substance as form. It has the sort of being that both transcends matter and, in its very transcendence, needs it for the accomplishment of its work as a spiritual substance. If the soul is a substance, consequently on the ground of its self-subsistence, its incompleteness of nature means it is a substance as completing the human species as the form of the body . . . We are invited by St. Thomas to think that in his very compositeness man is wholly intellectual but intellectual according to the mode of compositeness."

[3] See also *De Veritate* qu. 10, art. 8 ad 2: "The immediacy of the soul's ownmost intuition of itself confirms that man is already in the image and likeness of God as unfailingly existent: no one has ever made the mistake of not perceiving that he was alive, a fact which belongs to the knowledge by which one knows in its singularity what goes on in his soul. It is according to this knowledge that the soul is said to be habitually known through its essence."

[4] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 13, art. 2.

Aquinas's epistemology operates.[5] It is the "all or nothing," and when given proper focus, it elevates Thomistic personhood beyond the manual Thomism of act and potency, and places us in a dynamic intensive conversation with the postmodern sense of self.[6]

Postmodernity may have thrown many a baby out with the bathwater, but what it does well is debride personhood of the noumenal fixed identity. It provides a locus for the ancient Heraclitan erotic flux as counterpoint to the manufactured eternalism of self. With Deleuze: "The self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities. Each multiplicity is defined by a borderline functioning as Anomalous, but there is a string of borderlines, a continuous line of borderlines (fiber) following which the multiplicity changes."[7]

[5] See Frederick Wilhelmsen, *Man's Knowledge of Reality: An Introduction to Thomistic Epistemology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1956), 14. See also Maritain, *God and the Permission of Evil* (New York: Scribner, 1964), trans. Joseph W. Evans, 10. "In the order of Being and reality, God is the primal causation and thus the interior intelligibility of the known thing. This means that, for example, in the line of the good, God is the first and transcendent cause of our liberty and our free decisions, so that the free act is wholly from God as first cause and wholly from us as second cause; because there is not a fibril of Being which escapes the causality of God. Our liberty has the initiative of our acts, but this is a second initiative; it is God who has the first initiative."

[6] The uneasy anthropology of the Christian requires that the human person be both complete and incomplete, spiritual and temporal. We have a spiritual existence uncovered in the longer way of the material world. Our embodiment is never at odds with the self-presence of a spiritual existence. This is the vital wellspring of a genuine Thomistic thought but ignored by many Thomists. Instead, they utilize an Aristotelianism that is at odds with the dynamic intelligibility of St. Thomas, one that, on its own, is unable to accommodate the mystery of the faith that has wholly revolutionized the meaning of *imago dei*. Aristotelian Thomism becomes itself a type of cogito-consciousness. Postmodernism is not to blame for rendering the philosophical progress of Christianity immobile, sterile, and obsolete. It is Thomism itself when it reduces or bypasses the data of revelation that is the cause of its own sterility. Cf. McLuhan, introduction in Kenner, *Paradox in Chesterton* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), xvi: "Who then is the true Thomist? The man who contemplates an already achieved intellectual synthesis, or the man who, sustained by that synthesis, plunges into the heart of the chaos?" See also Gilson, *The Art of Misunderstanding Thomism* (West Hartford, CT: St. Joseph's College, 1966), 24: "In the art of misunderstanding Thomism, the crowning piece is the belief that Thomism is something to be found ready-made in a book. Nothing can be more sterile than mathematics so long as we don't apply it to the solving of particular problems. So will metaphysics remain sterile until you apply its conclusions to a constructive criticism of the science, the artistic production, the ethical and political action of today." Also see Maritain, *The Preface to Metaphysics* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1945), 1: "Thomism is not a museum piece. No doubt, like other systems of medieval philosophy, indeed, philosophic systems of all ages, it must be studied historically. All the great philosophies whether of the Middle Ages or any other period have that in their substance which to an extent triumphs over time. But Thomism does so more completely than any other since it harmonizes and exceeds them all, in a synthesis which transcends all its components. It is relevant to every epoch. It answers modern problems, both theoretical and practical. In face of contemporary aspirations and perplexities, it displays a power to fashion and emancipate the mind. We therefore look to Thomism at the present day to save: in the speculative order, intellectual values; in the practical order, so far as they can be saved by philosophy, human values. In short, we are concerned not with an archeological but a living Thomism."

[7] See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (St. Cloud, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 275.

Postmodernity serves as folly to the diminished byproducts of the Parmenidean and Platonic instantiations of soul that received its so-called fulcrum in the medieval Western vision, particularly, but I contend erroneously, in the Angelic Doctor.[8] Aquinas is clearly doing something other than a parroted manufactured self – Thomas is not Thomism.[9] Aquinas is engaging a real and constant *open* nature, and one that serves to recover personhood from its disastrous breakdown into heterogeneous instances of egoity and its dissolution of the subject as reformed under societal imprimatur, but also one that sees that personhood is a constant coming to be in Kierkegaard's sense:

> Someone existing is constantly in coming to be; the genuinely existing subjective thinker simulates this existence of his constantly in his thinking and invests all his thinking in becoming. It is the same as with style: the only writer who really has style is the one who never has anything finished, but 'troubles the waters of language' every time he begins, so that for him the most everyday expression comes into being with the pristine freshness of a new birth. To be thus constantly coming to be is infinitude's deceptiveness in existence. It is enough to bring a sensate person to despair, for one feels a constant urge to have something finished, but this urge is of evil and must be renounced. The continual becoming is the uncertainty of earthly life, in which everything is uncertain.[10]

[8] See Arthur Bradley, *Derrida's Of Grammatology* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 148–149: "This is another key term (along with logocentrism) that Derrida uses to describe the basic assumptions that underlie western thought. According to Derrida, the western philosophical tradition from Plato to the present day dogmatically posits a pure, full and unmediated presence as the supreme value. To Derrida's way of thinking, this 'presence' can take many forms: the presence of the subject to itself in thought, sight or touch, the presence of something in space and/or time, even a presence which has now been lost or which may be gained in the future. For Derrida, the metaphysics of presence expresses itself through the institution of a series of binary oppositions and hierarchies whereby a superior term will be identified with pure presence and an inferior term with the mediation or loss of that presence: speech versus writing, nature versus culture, the masculine versus the feminine and so on. In the Grammatology, Derrida seeks to deconstruct these binary oppositions by articulating a logic of mediation, difference and deferral that makes them possible in the first place."

[9] Pegis, *St. Thomas and Philosophy* (Milwaukee, MI: Marquette University Press, 1964), 38: "Detached from the Summa and its specific purpose, the treatise on man is neither philosophy nor theology. It is, to apply to it the severe but appropriate expression that Maritain has used in another context, a piece of lifeless and sterile theology: *une teologie degermee* . . . I hope indeed that the fragmentation of St. Thomas has come to an end. I hope that we shall undertake to build our own Christian Philosophy, not by detaching fragments from his theology but risking our own intellectual lives in the world of today."

[10] Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. Alastair Hannay (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 73.

Knowledge as an immanent act means that a non-mediated union with God begins our "knowing thyself."[11] Self-love, interested love, love born of *eros* and need is therefore not opposed to God's Love as fully disinterested love, Love of Other, love that puts away the self, or agapeic love. St. Thomas's creational metaphysics of the self is wholly bound up in God as the *To Be* of all participated beings. I am not I without God – the self is bound up in other, otherness, and the absolute Other Who alone knows the incommunicability of each self. We even see this meaning of self – both in person and in God – aphoristically laid bare in Berdyaev as a unique theological foreshadowing of a position such as Deleuze's:

> Spirit is never an object; nor a spiritual reality an objective one. In the so-called objective world there's no such nature, thing, or objective reality as spirit. Hence it is easy to deny the reality of spirit. God is spirit because he is not object, because he is subject.[12]

Here, from a surprising angle, we see the depth of filiation with Deleuze – that the human person appears to be a "string of borderlines," with Berdyaev that spirit is an easily deniable reality given its status exceeding entitative meaning. Aquinas acknowledges this reality when he stresses that to "know thyself" is bound up entirely in knowing God Who is innermost in all things, but to be like God is to know that which is irreducible, incommunicable, and untranslatable.[13] With Ruysbroeck: "In the most noble part of the soul, the domain of our spiritual powers, we are constituted in the form of a living and eternal mirror of God; we bear in it the imprint of His eternal image, and no other image can ever enter there."[14]

To be in the image and likeness of God is to experience what is irreducible, simple, and untranslatable: Thus, how does person translate

[11] We are dwelling on the paradox of the Thomistic epistemology. In essence, what is soul at its center, so that it can be, in a way, all things? Aquinas holds that the human person possesses a kind of knowledge that stands distinct from the longer way of reflexive self-knowledge: that, more original than the phantasms, the soul knows itself. See *De Veritate*, qu. 10, art. 8 ad 1: "Our understanding can actually understand nothing before it abstracts from phantasms. Nor can it have habitual knowledge of things other than itself, which are not within it, before the abstraction just mentioned, because species of other intelligible things are not innate in it. However, its essence is innate in it, so that it does not have to obtain it from phantasms, just as it is not the essence of matter which is received from the natural agent, but only its form, which is related to physical matter as intelligible form is related to sensible matter, as the Commentator says. Therefore, before the mind abstracts from phantasms, it has habitual knowledge of itself, by which it can perceive that it exists."

[12] Nikolai. Berdyaev, *Spirit and Reality*, trans. G. Reavey (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), 5.

[13] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 8, art. 1.

[14] John Ruysbroeck, *The Mirror of Eternal Salvation: Collected Works of John Ruysbroeck, Vol. 1* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu, 2022), trans. C. A. Wynschenck, 8.

one's personhood? Certainly, the easier or cheaper alternative is a manufactured fully closed identity, each assigned, but this is not Aquinas. Aquinas sets out an open nature responsive to the divine mystery. The human person is *person* because he is being protracted and stretched along in the precarity of soul inhabiting flesh; he is already on that so-called postmodern borderline, but it is revealed as the horizon between time and eternity.[15] The underbelly of such a dramatic protracting "know thyself" is that it *can* encounter and engage the vibrating no-thing at root in Being, the cosmogonic difference of being the one being *in* but not *of* time. In the sheer original ordering of its cosmogonic Necessity, Being is beyond self, a kind of death, an intensity few of us want to encounter. The noblest theology is at risk of losing sight of the consuming encounter with the divine by reducing the beauty and terror of Being to a reassurance of the self in God. With Houellebecq:

> The universe screams. The concrete records the violence that's hit it like a wall. The concrete cries. The grass groans under the animal teeth. And Man? What can we say of man? The world is suffering spread out, on display. At its origin, there is a knot of suffering. All existence is an expansion and a crushing. All things suffer until they are. Nothingness vibrates with suffering, until it arrives at being: in an abject paroxysm.[16]

To be Aquinas's person on the horizon between time and eternity is to experience the violence of the *agon* but without a concession to weak theology, or a disintegration of personhood whereas the manufactured self too cannot withstand this violence. For Aquinas, the human soul knows itself, knows the eternal through time, and its knowing is the non-mediated surpassing contact with the divine Who is existence itself. We

[15] Compare St. Thomas, *Summa contra Gentiles* lib. 2, cap. 68: "Dionysius says: Divine wisdom has joined the ends of the higher to the beginnings of the lower. Thus in the genus of bodies we find the human body, composed of elements equally tempered, attaining to the lowest member of the class above it, that is, to the human soul, which holds the lowest rank in the class of subsistent intelligences. Hence the human soul is said to be on the horizon and boundary line [Confinium/aeviternity] between things corporeal and incorporeal, inasmuch as it is an incorporeal substance and at the same time the form of a body." *Summa contra Gentiles* lib. 3, cap. 61: "The human person, by virtue of his intellectual soul stands on the borderline, the horizon or confinium between eternity and time." St. Thomas stresses this point throughout his works, emphasizing that the soul is shown to hold the last place among intellectual things. See *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 80–81; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 80; *De Veritate* qu. 10, art. 8. See also Pseudo-Aristotle, *Book of Causes* §22: "Indeed, the being that is after eternity and beyond time is Soul, because it is on the horizon of eternity from below and beyond time." §84: "And indeed, Intelligence encompasses the things it produces, both Nature and the horizon of Nature, namely, the Soul, for it is above Nature." See also Étienne. Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 235–237.

[16] Michel Houellebecq, *Staying Alive*, ed. Jean de Loisy (Paris: Flammarion, 2016), 10.

can see this radical demanding personhood when we unpack the dry Thomistic language of the hypostasis. This is the fundamental grounding of person, that which must remain and stands underneath in all becoming, the underlying core constituting the subsistent individual who has a rational nature and is also complete in its nature. The human person possesses two rational powers: the intellect, where we formulate understanding of the universals, and the will where we make judgments and act upon them. This combination of intellect and will, enacting their powers, seeking the universal and acting upon it, is a specially human power, distinguishing us as persons. The objector claims: "Further, the human soul is a substance. But it is not a universal substance. Therefore it is a particular substance. Therefore it is a 'hypostasis' or a person; and it can only be a human person. Therefore the soul is man; for a human person is a man."[17]

The Angelic Doctor's response is crucial to his understanding of the *longior via* that cuts into the very heart of personhood. A person is neither soul nor body but the enacting union of the two. Aquinas in Question 74 defends the *thisness* of person, enjoining the particular person with the dignity of the species, not surrendering the precarity of flesh and bones: "For as it belongs to the notion of this particular man to be composed of this soul, of this flesh, and of these bones; so it belongs to the notion of man to be composed of soul, flesh, and bones; for whatever belongs in common to the substance of all the individuals contained under a given species, must belong to the substance of the species."[18] In the reply to the objection, St. Thomas stresses that the hypostasis is a *complete* nature of its species. This dramatic view means that that complete nature of the person is shot through with the eternal as soul and stretching that soul through time through the body, and this union of soul and body, the eternal and temporal which inhabit them, together and unified, is the person.

Not every particular substance is a hypostasis or a person, but that which has the complete nature of its species. Hence a hand or a foot is not called a hypostasis or a person; nor, likewise, is the soul alone so called, since it is a part of the human species.[19]

Persons are subsistent individuals and not the substantial form of something else, but while the soul is the form of the body and has the completing *actus* to survive death, it is also incomplete without the body; it needs the protracting through time that embodiment gives it. This status as

[17] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 74, art. 4, obj. 2.
[18] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 74, art. 4, resp.
[19] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 74, art. 4 ad 2.

substantial form and needing completion, making and forming the self, evokes the very paradoxical structure of the human person. The human person is an overflowing composite unity as the way of relation to Being. The unity of soul and body is a polarity rendering the human person the unfolding *logos* of time and history, revealing person as the being of time and *the* historical being – the meaning of history does not unfold without the human soul; neither does time; they are non-sequiturs without the privileged being who speaks Being. We see Foucault, from a diverse vantage, speak to this existential conversation of the human person, the person as conversion, as the *logos* of time and history:

> Spirituality postulates that the truth is never given to the subject by right . . . It postulates that for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must be changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself . . . It follows that from this point of view there can be no truth without a conversion or a transformation of the subject . . . The truth enlightens the subject; the truth gives beatitude to the subject; the truth gives the subject tranquility of the soul. In short, in the truth and in access to the truth, there is something that fulfills the subject himself, which fulfills or transfigures his very being.[20]

Aquinas understands this transfiguring, which Foucault poetically and rapturously describes as a critical indicator of the human person. But Aquinas's specific goal is to show how identity can and does endure otherness and change, how there is a metaphysical constant to personhood *as* it moves though conversion and transformation. He does so through the *To Be* of God as non-mediated and the radical union of essence and existence. By virtue of our compositeness as creative contingency, the human person is pulled toward Being in a twofold way: completeness and in-completeness – reflecting and recreating the *confiniuum* between time and eternity, beyond nature but not beyond image. Persons exceed nature to be in God's image and as God's image exceeds image as Being itself, the human person through time continuously re-presents, re-images, re-figures the very meaning of human nature and of what it is to be *imago dei*.[21] It is the property of our metaphysical nature to be a radical openness

[20] Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France 1981–1982*, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 15–16.

[21] Jacques Maritain, *Approaches to God*, trans. Peter O'Reilly (New York: Harper, 1954), 111: "Nothing is more human than for man to desire naturally things impossible to his nature. It is, indeed, the property of a nature which is not closed up in matter like the nature of physical things, but which is intellectual or infinitized by the spirit. It is the property of a metaphysical nature. Such desires reach for the infinite, because the intellect thirsts for Being and Being is infinite. They are natural, but one may also call them transnatural."

to the infinite and to desire Being in order to fulfill the self. This *is* radical personhood. Personhood "rests on this anamnesis of the Creator, which is identical to the ground of our existence . . . nothing belongs less to me than I myself. My own 'I' is the site of the profoundest surpassing of self and contact with Him from whom I came and toward whom I am going."[22] In Aquinas's exploration of essence and existence as the foundational creational tools for personhood, there is an aspect of each person by which he most interiorally partakes in the incommunicability of God's essence. Each person carries the demand of partaking in the image of God as Being beyond image. Preceding postmodernity, Aquinas deeply acknowledges that the human person partakes in a self beyond fixity. Our personhood comes from the experience of our *imago dei* in an untranslatable way; or, more precisely, translated only by God who stamped us with that image and likeness so far as to enable us as existential participants in God's incommunicability. In Aquinas's epistemology, indebted to creaturely dependency, the human person is individual because he radicalizes the meaning of image and likeness, the capacity to receive what precedes idea, description, and image. The creation of persons capable of receiving *To Be* is a dramatically distinct Act and thus engenders a wholly distinct meaning to *imago dei* than any *telos* could ever express, and entirely opposed to a constructed self-enclosed ego.[23] Aquinas's personhood is no mere default position; it is a position that can configure the raising from the ashes the questions of divine meaning.[24]

[22] Joseph. Cardinal Ratzinger, *On Conscience* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007), 33. For a nascent but complementary sense of personhood in Aquinas, see *Compendium Theologiae*, cap. 45: "As the object known is in the knower to the extent that it is known, so the beloved must be in the lover, as loved. The lover is, in some way, moved by the beloved with a certain interior impulse. Therefore, since a mover is in contact with the object moved the beloved must be intrinsic to the lover. But God, just as He understands Himself, must likewise love Himself; for good, as apprehended, is in itself lovable. Consequently God is in Himself as beloved in lover."

[23] Compare Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, cap. 50. Of immense interest is the fact that the human person can be understood in three aspects: nature, intellect, love; the latter two – knowing and loving – unlike in God, are not identical with his existence. Yet there is, in his nature, an aspect refusing mediation: by existing in our nature, we are subsisting things residing beneath and within intellect and love. As subsisting things, we receive this existential subsistence by way of efficient causation, from God's *To Be* as innermost in all things. And because God's Being cannot be stripped from His existence, there is an aspect of each of us that cannot be stripped of this divine existence. We live beyond self-enclosed reflection and carry an intuition of Being prior to any intellectual mediation. This is the fertile ground for the *anamnesis* set out by Ratzinger.

[24] See "Between God and Metaphysics: An Interview with William Desmond," *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1:1 and 2 (2012): 357–373, 364: "A default position is something for which a particular system is primed – the result of a certain configuration of being. We should be reflecting on that configuration. What are the configurations of thought and being that hinder even the arising of the question of God?"

The person, body and soul, is an incarnated stretched spirit.[25] Our unity is that we are spirit involved wholly in a discursive intellectual life on the horizon of matter, we enact rational motion within embodiment, and in an intensifying historical approach to intellectual formation and spiritual unification. Habermas describes the stretched human person as odyssey, but is this *post-metaphysical* or the very revelatory metaphysics of Aquinas?

From the structure of language comes the explanation of why the human spirit is condemned to an odyssey – why it first finds its way to itself only on a detour via a complete externalization in other things and in other humans. Only at the greatest distance from itself does it become conscious of itself in its irreplaceable singularity as an individuated being.[26]

Aquinas's thought reveals that "irreplaceable singularity," but it can *only* be anchored through *To Be*. Our personhood necessitates contact with the divine *To Be*, non-mediated and without measure, the ground of thought, the Being who *is* existence.[27] The human person participating in this ground extracts from the discursive intellectual life a core supernatural temporality, one not measured horizontally by change alone. Each person is fully entrenched and unable to be measured precisely to bestow the exact ontological dignity; each is an overflowing composite. *Actus* provides the universal as much as it ensures no human soul can be assimilated fully by another. This entrenchment in *To Be* where personhood reveals itself, not only existentially prevents assimilation – in knowledge, we become the other *as other* yet remain ourselves – also enables the universal to appear as universal, as well as unrepeatable and unique as Being *Is*. In essence:

> If the soul were merely ontologically present to my internal acts and not perceived intuitively as their principle, I would have consciousness of some impersonal activity attributable by inference to a principle x that is known

[25] Poetically, we see this in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Random House, 2015), 84: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body."

[26] Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Between Metaphysics and the Critique of Reason* (London: Blackwell, 1992), 47.

[27] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 6, art. 3. See also G. K. Chesterton, *St. Thomas Aquinas: The Dumb Ox* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 95: "To this question 'Is there anything?' St. Thomas begins by answering 'Yes'; if he began by answering 'No', it would not be the beginning, but the end. That is what some of us call common sense. Either there is no philosophy, no philosophers, no thinkers, no thought, no anything; or else there is a real bridge between the mind and reality. But he is actually less exacting than many thinkers, much less so than most rationalist and materialist thinkers, as to what that first step involves; he is content, as we shall see, to say that it involves the recognition of Ens or Being as something definitely beyond ourselves. Ens is Ens: Eggs are eggs, and it is not tenable that all eggs were found in a mare's nest."

> by abstraction; I would not have consciousness of my acts as mine, of acts which belong to the subject whom I call myself, and whose incommunicable individuality I experience from within.[28]

It also evokes the metaphysics of our union of body and soul. As intellectual substances, our souls act from eternity when they act in time. And because it is our nature to be unified to a body, to be a dual unity, we are connaturally in and not in time in every act of intentionality.[29] Human persons act from eternity as united to their incorporeal intellectual substance, which, as the form of the body, protracts that eternity into the moving image of their own selves. This is why embodied existence, as existentially dependent on God, is our individuating principle. This longer way is the moving image of eternity discovered in the experience of time. We are able to be the moving image of eternity because our aeviternal nature directs us to one aeviternity[30] by which all – man and angels – are measured, thereby reaffirming that we act from eternity when we act in time.

In a way, we act from the same incorporeality, the same eternity or aeviternity, as the angels, but realize this activity in manifestly different ways. The angels act from eternity, identical to their incorporeal intellectual substance existentially dependent on God. That is why each angel is its own species. Human persons act from eternity as united to their incorporeal intellectual substance that, as the form of the body, protracts that eternity into the moving image of their own selves. This is why embodied existence, as existentially dependent on God, is our individuating principle and why human beings are of the same species. Eternity under the mode of

[28] John. P. Ruane, "Self-Knowledge and the Spirituality of the Soul in St. Thomas," *New Scholasticism* 2 (1958): 434.

[29] See Pegis, *At the Origins*, 14: "Like other thinkers of their age, William of Saint-Thierry and Godfrey of Saint-Victor . . . had great difficulty in understanding how a simple and immaterial soul was present to the body and yet not in a spatial way. But this problem, which is at least as old as Plotinus and St. Augustine, not to mention Nemesius, is witness to the metaphysical innocence of the twelfth century."

[30] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 10, art. 6 ad. 2. See also F. Sheed, *Theology and Sanity* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1993), 287: "Aeviternity is the proper sphere of every created spirit, and therefore of the human soul. But the soul's special relation to the matter of the human body gives it a necessary and proper relation to continuous time (which is the body's duration) which other spirits are not troubled by. At death, this distracting relation to matter's time ceases to affect the soul, so that it can experience its proper aeviternity. But during this life, time presses upon the soul, if only by way of the heartbeats that never cease. The soul can become too much immersed in matter, in the limitations of time and space and change. Love of change is a disease that the soul contracts from the body; one sure symptom of it is the inability to contemplate. During contemplation, time really does stand still for the soul, which is one reason why we should practise it: for it means practising the soul in its own proper element."

an incorporeal aeviternity befits the angelic nature. This is why a total immediate eternal damnation befits the fallen angels and eternal totalizing elevation is fitting for the thrones and dominions. Eternity under the mode of an embodied aeviternity befits human nature. But for human beings, a longer way was assigned. This longer way is the moving image of eternity discovered in the experience of time. We are able to be the moving image of eternity because our aeviternal nature directs us to one aeviternity by which all – man and angels – are measured, thereby reaffirming that we act from eternity when we act in time.[31]

For Aquinas, our immateriality is not meant to be ideational or disembodied but to have shape, breadth, length, texture, sound, and smell, and to reflect the dignity of the "whole human soul in the whole body."[32] Our immateriality is meaningful if it enlivens the ecstatic reaches of human beings who act from eternity when they act in time. We seek to avoid the anemic Cartesian spiritualism that forsakes the senses as something shed along the way to enlightenment, or their reduction to a biological soft determinism whose varying degrees of physiological difference could never account for the phenomenological difference as difference between humans and animals.[33]

[31] Caitlin Smith Gilson, *Subordinated Ethics: Natural Law and Moral Miscellany in Aquinas and Dostoyevsky* (Eugene: Cascade, 2020), xxxv–vi. See also Étienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Thomism* (New York: Harper, 1964), 34: "From the intellectual substances to the spiritual substances the distance is considerable, yet it is a small one compared with the distance there is from man to brute . . . man is much farther removed from beasts than from angels."

[32] While angels are far closer in image to God, St. Thomas deeply acknowledges the dignity of the human person, who, relatively speaking, by likeness or a likening power befitting intellectual substance and embodiment, is higher than the angels. See *Summa Theologiae* I, 93, 3 resp.: "We may speak of God's image in two ways. First, we may consider in it that in which the image chiefly consists, that is, the intellectual nature. Thus, the image of God is more perfect in the angels than in man, because their intellectual nature is more perfect, as is clear from what has been said (I:58:3; I:79:8). Secondly, we may consider the image of God in man as regards its accidental qualities, so far as to observe in man a certain imitation of God, consisting in the fact that man proceeds from man, as God from God; and also in the fact that the whole human soul is in the whole body, as God from God; and also in the fact that the whole human soul is in the whole body, and again, in every part, as God is in regard to the whole world. In these and the like things the image of God is more perfect in man than it is in the angels. But these do not of themselves belong to the nature of the Divine image in man, unless we presuppose the first likeness, which is in the intellectual nature; otherwise even brute animals would be to God's image. Therefore, as in their intellectual nature, the angels are more to the image of God than man is, we must grant that, absolutely speaking, the angels are more to the image of God than man is, but that in some respects man is more like to God."

[33] See Chad Engelland, *Phenomenology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 100: "Life can be perceived by life only in the mirroring of the self and other made possible by the twofoldness of flesh: we perceive ourselves perceiving and we perceive others perceiving. In this way, Edith Stein argues that a non-living observer, say, an alien robot, would be able to track mechanical movements but would be blind to life experienced in that moment."

What is personhood for Aquinas? It is the powerhouse reality that we act from eternity when we act in time. We act upon Being itself as foreknowledge that knows not by limits but by infinite, immemorial Being. We act out eternity insofar as our self-created acts participate in an uncreated knowledge of our acts and self. Thomistic personhood offers a deeper free will than any postmodern stretched egoity could ever provide! Free will is not merely the ever degenerate ability to choose one horizontal option over another; it is the ability to witness the irreducible, ultimate, and uncreated by acting within the uncreated, acting from within the eternal through time, and making something that is temporal to be immemorial, eternal, unrepeatable, *and personal*: making ourselves divine. Because personhood is enacted on God's *To Be*, it endures becoming, it grows, changes, and yet it *Is*. God as foundation for persons immemorializes both the being and the becoming of our personhood. God knows all our actions, which include those both necessary and contingent, as well as their results, whether fulfilled or impeded. His knowledge cannot preclude but must even uphold the interplay of contingent outcomes.

Moreover, just as from a necessary cause an effect follows with certitude, so it follows from a complete contingent cause if it is not impeded. But since, as appears from what was said above, God knows all things, He knows not only the causes of contingent things but also those things by which these causes may be impeded. Therefore, He knows with certitude whether contingent things are or are not.[34]

In Aquinas, our individuality is predicated on participating in God's essence, but because the divine essence *as existence itself*[35] is not an enclosed or finite eternal essence, but an infinite essence, this provides the grounding both for the unity of personhood within mankind (species) as well as orienting and clarifying that unity to be radically its own, *this* particular person (individual). Our *thisness* is grounded in the same bottomless and effulgent foundation in God as are His formal aspects. God is not an enclosed finite eternal or prime mover but, again, an infinite essence who imports into each being, simultaneously, the communication of essence

[34] *Summa Contra Gentiles* lib. 1, cap. 67.

[35] Compare *Summa Theologiae* I, 3, resp.: "Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence."

and the incommunicability necessary for personhood.[36] With William Desmond:

> The origin is not the univocal one, but the One that is more than the one. The One that is more than the one is an indeterminate one. The indeterminate One, as we glean from divining the promise of becoming, is other with an otherness beyond all finite identification and othering. It is this never-to-be-completely-determined excess of creative plenitude.[37]

Aquinas's emphasis on the absolute *thisness* of the human person cannot be overlooked: "No part has the completion of its nature when separated from the whole. Hence, since the soul is a part of human nature, it does not have the completion of its nature except in union with the body."[38] The working together of body and soul ensures the dynamic reality of the human person as a consistent irreducible reality effectively counteracting the dissolution of personhood into instantiations of ego, as well as the response to the postmodern preoccupation that personhood is not a static entitative non-informative noumenon. We take heed of Derrida's critique:

> I say "undecidability" rather than "indeterminacy" because I am interested more in relations of force, in differences of force, in everything that allows, precisely, determinations in given [e.g. discursive, semantic, ethical, political] situations to be stabilized through a decision of writing (in the broad sense I give to this word, which also includes political action and experience in general). To be sure, in order for structures of undecidability to be possible (and hence structures of decisions and of responsibilities as well), there must be a certain play, *différance*, nonidentity. Not of indetermination, but of *différance* or of nonidentity with oneself in the very process of determination. *Différance* is not indeterminacy. It renders determinacy both possible and necessary. Someone might say: but if it renders determinacy possible, it is because it itself is "indeterminacy." Precisely not, since first of all it "'is" in itself nothing outside of different determinations; second, and

[36] See Stephen Brock, "Is Uniqueness at the Root of Personal Dignity?" *The Thomist* 69 (2005): 36: "This is not to say that abstract rational nature itself is the proper subject of the dignity. The proper subject is the individual that subsists in such nature. Individuality certainly does contribute to the constitution of his dignity, because only individuals subsist. What does not subsist cannot properly 'have' the good. 'Rational nature' only expresses the formal principle, the constitutive feature that completes the determination of the person's status as one who exists for his own sake. But while a person's individuality, and hence incommunicability, is thus very much tied to his dignity, it is not by involving something that makes him somehow one of a kind. Of course he must be somehow distinct from the others of his kind, but he does not need to have a proper *differentia*, a grade of being that is exclusively his, in order to claim personhood."

[37] William Desmond, *Being and the Between* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1995), 242.

[38] Aquinas, *De Spiritualibus Creaturis*, qu. un. art. 2 ad 5.

> consequently, it never comes to a full stop anywhere . . . and is neither negativity nor nothingness (as indeterminacy would be).[39]

Aquinas's relation of incomplete and completeness – the soul as substantial form of the body and *needing* the body for its completion – makes dialogic space for the *différance*, for that panoply of force and relation that protract and uncover the human person, but it does so without rendering nature impotent, a *neant*. It *is our nature to be beyond nature*: the recognition of the soul and body as co-parts is a testament to the human person as the very movement toward completion.[40] The activity of our compositeness can be said to be the epistemological response to our own creational mystery necessitating union with *To Be*. Life by way of composite need confirms that the person is the becoming of his or her own personal history.[41] Aquinas does not leave the human person either as a whole without neediness, and what embodiment and all its vicissitudes provide, nor does he leave our composite unity as parceled out instantiations reducible to time.[42] In these respects, his is the most potent response to the postmodern diminution of self. If the self is nothing more than the amalgamation of partial potencies, it would be a disastrous oversimplification of the drama of the human personhood, particularly in terms of envisioning our goal and *telos*. Lose the metaphysical balance of personhood that Aquinas presents and the pendulum swings where the goodness and relevance of the world is subverted – it becomes all cosmogonic *agon*, or the meaning and goal of heaven is *nullified*, because there is no hypostasis, only time-bound instantiation. This time-bound instantiation defines, for example, Derrida's thinking on personhood:

> Iteration in its "purest" form – and it is always impure – contains in itself the discrepancy of a difference that constitutes it as iteration. The iterability of

[39] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman and Samuel Weber (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 148–149.

[40] See Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, trans. William Finlayson Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), n. 72: "For after all what is man in nature? A nothing in relation to infinity, all in relation to nothing, a central point between nothing and all and infinitely far from understanding either. The ends of things and their beginnings are impregnably concealed from him in an impenetrable secret. He is equally incapable of seeing the nothingness out of which he was drawn and the infinite in which he is engulfed."

[41] See Pegis, *At the Origins*, 56: "The slow maturing of man, his need to spend time being a man, is for St. Thomas no more than the outward and visible sign of a deeper and inward temporality. For thus to be a man is to be becoming one through a personal history."

[42] Pegis, *At the Origins*, 38–39: "St. Thomas decided that man could be one being in nature if soul and body were related to each another as co-parts, that is, as incomplete members of a whole that alone could verify and explain their meaning even as parts. The human soul, therefore, though a spiritual substance in itself, yet had the incomplete nature of a part; it was by nature both a substance and a substantial form, and therefore somehow truly both whole and a part . . . It is the soul as a whole that, in explaining the meaning of soul as a part, likewise explains the meaning of man as a whole."

> an element divides its own identity a priori, even without taking into account the fact that this identity can only determine or delimit itself through differential relations to other ele-ments and that it hence bears the mark of this difference. It is because this iter-ability is differential, within each individual "element" as well as between the "elements," because it splits each element while constituting it, because it marks it with an articulatory break, that the remainder, although indispensable, is never that of a full or fulfilling presence: it is a differential structure escaping the logic of presence or the (simple or dialectical) opposition of presence and absence, upon which opposition the idea of permanence depends.[43]

Either the unity of body and soul is accentuated as parts-in-need at the cost of relationship or the unity is truncated into the singular dominance of the soul or mind as whole, which undermines the neediness or in-completeness central to both. These alternatives neglect the fact that the composite unity must somehow be both. Derrida, vacated of metaphysical realism, tries and fails to hit this delicate but essential threshold. For him, presences never achieve the permanence that Being assures as sub-stance, no presence is ever fully present, as it becomes other it fails to retain self, for the becoming is context, and context is moving: "There is nothing outside of the text."[44] Every presence – object, utterance, person, event – is only its own *is* for the time being, within the relation of traces, the optics of contingency that materialize it *as* other. But this is not the strong thought in Kant's sense; the demands of becoming refute any strong philosophical utterance of idealism, any assertion of absolute relativism as metaphysical foundation. Again, with Derrida:

> We can call "context" the entire "real-history-of-the-world," if you like, in which this value of objectivity and, even more broadly, that of truth have taken on meaning and imposed themselves. That does not in the slightest dis-credit them. In the name of what, of which other "truth," moreover, would it? One of the definitions of what is called deconstruction would be the effort to take this limitless context into account, to pay the sharpest and broadest attention possible to context, and thus to an incessant movement of recontextualization. The phrase which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction ("there is nothing outside the text"), means nothing else: there is nothing outside context. In this form, which says exactly the same thing, the formula would doubtless have been less shocking. I am not certain that it would have provided more to think about.[45]

[43] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 53. [44] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 136. [45] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 136.

Thomistic personhood avoids the Gordian knots of postmodernity's "incessant movement of recontextualization," the Cartesian angelism that demands a static sense of personhood at the cost of embodiment and world, even the Aristotelian notion of soul that prefigures an admirable phenomenological givenness but fails the threshold test of being descriptively faithful to the phenomena. Herein lies the paradox: The soul is an incomplete part without the body, and yet if it were only a part, it could not function as its substantial form and as its guiding principle. But on the other hand, if the soul is the substantial form of the body as its formal aspect, are we not reevaluating the unity of the body and soul as to whether it benefits the body or the soul? As substantial form of the body, the soul must be a substance in its own right and thus be able to stand distinct and without the need or aid of the body: "Mind in this sense of it is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity (for always the active is superior to the passive factor, the originating force to the matter which it forms)."[46] If this is the case, is there not a shortcut to God, by way of the immediacy of the soul as substance or form, so much so as to be separable, impassible, and unmixed? But a shortcut seems to fly in the face of creational contingency, it perverts the *longior via* into an angelism, delegitimizing our composite unity. If the soul is in "its essential nature activity," then Aquinas is utilizing Aristotle but also transcending his metaphysics. The soul's "activity" means that it is a co-part with the body; it is the substantial form and therefore act of the body. This act has a clear twofold structure: The soul is substance or whole, but it is manifested as substantial form of the body that refigures the meaning of that completion, wholeness, or unity. Because the soul's substance is to be the active or animating principle of the body, this reveals that the soul needs the body to find its own perfection and to be in the activity of its perfection.

For the soul is not only substance and form but substance as form. It has the sort of being that both transcends matter and, in its very transcendence, needs it for the accomplishment of its work as a spiritual substance. If the soul is a substance, consequently on the ground of its self-subsistence, its incompleteness of nature means it is a substance as completing the human species as the form of the body.[47]

The unity of body and soul is for Aquinas our expressed perfection, so much so that this compositeness is for the sake of the soul as much as it is for the sake of the body. St. Thomas denies any anti-phenomenological

[46] Aristotle, *De Anima*, 430a15–20. [47] Pegis, *At the Origins*, 39.

immortality of the soul attributed to Plato. For Aquinas, the human essence is *ens in concreto*: the soul is the form of the body; it is unnatural for the soul to be separated from it. It would be unfitting if God created the soul without a body; true co-parts imply fundamental unity. The unity of body and soul evokes personhood. Aquinas respects the radicality and integrity of Creation, that the unity of body and soul is for the benefit not only of the soul but also the body. Personhood is discovered in the delicate balance issued in Aquinas's teaching: We cannot reduce the soul to a mere "part" or view it as an unfettered "whole," acting as if it has no ontological need for the body:

> For if it is natural to the soul to be united to the body, it is unnatural to it to be without a body, and as long as it is without a body it is deprived of its natural perfection. Now it was not fitting that God should begin His work with things imperfect and unnatural, for He did not make man without a hand or a foot, which are natural parts of a man. Much less, therefore, did He make the soul without a body.[48]

Aquinas has reaffirmed composite unity with an even more robust metaphysics, one that responds to the mystery of creation. For Aquinas, human persons are wholly contingent on God for their perfection. This is the insight of *creatio ex nihilo* and it is reason benefiting from Revelation.[49] The composite unity in Aristotle shows that the form is discoverable in matter, what is discovered is one notion of *To Be* in an eternally existing and uncreated eternal universe. Such a view may be susceptible to the postmodern critique that metaphysics cannot account for a genuine stretched otherness to personhood. But Aquinas is doing something different.[50] The form and the eternal uncreated universe of

[48] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 118, art. 3.

[49] See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1994), 13–14. "There are three things we cannot do: we cannot carry on with natural metaphysics, natural ethics, natural jurisprudence, natural study of history, acting as though Christ were not the norm of everything. Nor can we lay down an unrelated 'double truth', with the secular scholar and scientist on the one hand and the theologian on the other studying the same object without any encounter of intersection between their two methods. Nor, finally, can we allow the secular disciplines to be absorbed by theology as though it alone were competent in all cases because Christ alone is the norm, Precisely because Christ is the absolute he remains incommensurate with the norms of the world; and no final accord between theology and the other disciplines is possible within the limits of this world. The refusal of any such agreed demarcation on the part of theology, though it may look like and be called arrogance, is really no more than respect for the methodological demands of its subject."

[50] See Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1952), 49–50: "The primary mistake of Aristotle, as well as of his followers, was to use the verb 'to be' in a single meaning, whereas it actually has two. If it means that a thing is, then individuals alone are, and forms are not; if it means what a thing is, then forms alone are and individuals are not. The controversy on the being of universals has no other origin than the failure of

Aristotle's cosmology cannot support the identification of man as creature, whose perfection is bound up in the otherness of the world and in God, the way it must for St. Thomas, cast as it is in its trajectory toward the Incarnation.

Human persons act from eternity as united to their incorporeal intellectual substance that, as the form of the body, protracts that eternity into the moving image of their own selves.[51] This is why embodied existence, as existentially dependent on God, is our individuating principle and why human beings are of the same species. Personhood is Aquinas's celebrated *longior via* – the moving image of eternity discovered in the experience of time that more than addresses the postmodern criticism of metaphysical identity as static and uninformative. We are able to be the moving image of eternity because our aeviternal nature directs us to one aeviternity by which all – man and angels – are measured, thereby reaffirming that we act from eternity when we act in time.[52] The phenomenological experience of time that permeates all experience *is* the experience of human nature as aeviternal, and communal human nature as history. Time does not exist outside of human natures. Animals may affectively experience change, but they do not experience time or historicity. Time is the unity that occurs when a being resides on the horizon between eternity and time, where the soul acts from eternity in order to raise its own being into freedom above change and succession. Historical being demands the impossible: The human person is the totalizing unity of the embodied *as* the spiritual while still pointing to the spiritual that the embodied craves; the temporal is realized *as* the eternal while pointing to the eternal that it lacks and needs in order to fulfill itself. If we do not merely take up some "space" between time and eternity but are the beings whose natures

Aristotle himself to make this fundamental distinction. In his philosophy, as much as in that of Plato, what is does not exist, and that which exists is not."

[51] See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 192: "The philosopher knows that bodies have absolute dimensions, that there are in the world absolute motions, an absolute time, simultaneities which are absolute for events divided as far as may be in space: absolute signifies here entirely determined in itself, independently of any observer: the knowledge of what these are, the discernments of these absolute dimensions, movements, simultaneities (at a distance), time, by the aid of our means of observation and measurement, the philosopher renounces, voluntarily conceding that it is not possible. It is sufficient for him that they can be discerned by pure minds, which know without observing from a given point of space and time. The physicist makes a like renunciation, and with good reason. But for him, he is not a philosopher and is only occupied with what lie can measure and in so far as it can be measured, the existence of these absolutes does not count, and in their place he knows only and manipulates relative entities re-constituted by means of measurable determinations: *entia rationis cum fundametito in re*."

[52] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 10, art. 6.

reside on the *confinium* itself, then our temporalizing actions must reveal our eternity *as* history, history that itself points to the eternal that it desires *as other*. We see this in the union of spouses and of parents to their children who are others as other, but yet seek to be that other contemporaneously. These unions exceed knowledge while at the same time seeking out knowledge to express and complete themselves. As we act from eternity when we act in time, time itself alone reveals to us that we act from the eternal. And *how* we realize this temporalizing revelation of the eternal is through an incarnated intentionality whereby I know and love myself *only* by being the other who in turn is capable of being the other who *I am*.

The postmodern self attempts this historical stretching forth of the person absent metaphysics, void of God. But what it ends up with is the human person as a loosely formed egoity comprising material, economic, social, and historical circumstances. There is no stable foundation, so that the essence "human" is a placeholder fundamentally connoting only its source in time, a death as nihilating dispersion. The postmodern egoity cannot be Aquinas's unity of consciousness anymore, self-surpassing and capable of surrender. Instead, the subject is the reconfiguring of events, effects, and stimuli over the decomposition of meaning and language that is the terrible result of temporality estranged from the eternal and grafted to death. This is the loss of call and response – of our responsiveness to the horizon between time and eternity. Constantly dividing, the postmodern self repeatedly dispenses with any threatening unities of consciousness, which would reek of metaphysical yearning. This concatenation of effects arises, multiplies, and swarms at moments to mimic unity under the auspices of the political or social "I" and then disperses back into non-hierarchical proliferation. It is precisely this faceless leviathan where ideological thought can advance its ground as never before. Having removed any sense of "I" as individual unity of consciousness, it reforms the "I" as a social cause, a revolutionary they-self. To live in this way, where there is little or no way to be, is as close not only to godlessness but also to thoughtlessness itself. The recovery of personhood should take the postmodern critique into account. Personhood is not a static identity, a label atop the currents of becoming, nor is it vacated of the radical metaphysics that enables it to be and to become, to be the moving image of eternity, stretching as history itself.

> Forgetfulness is like a song. That, freed from beat and measure, wanders. Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled, Outspread and motionless, – A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly. Forgetfulness is rain at night, Or an old house in a forest, – or a child. Forgetfulness is white, – white as a blasted tree, and it may stun the sybil into prophecy, Or bury the Gods. I can remember much forgetfulness.[53]

[53] Hart Crane, *The Collected Poems of Hart Crane* (London: Liveright, 1946), 27.

CHAPTER 6

Aquinas and Disability

Catherine Peters

"Disability" is hardly a new aspect of human life. It can be present at any time and in any place, including at any stage of life and across any socioeconomic divide. Disability, furthermore, can take a variety of forms and result from a range of causes.[1] At present, there are well over a billion persons in the world who experience a disability of some kind. Although this number represents only 16 percent of the total population, the personal significance of disability sharply increases when one considers its indirect impact on family members, friends, and society.[2] Given the pervasiveness of "disability" in human life, the relative lack of consideration of this issue throughout philosophical history is surprising, even shocking. There are, perhaps, some ready ways to account for this neglect. First, "disability," even etymologically, assumes an account of "ability," which in turn presupposes an account of what the human being *is* and what a human being can or should be able *to do*. Given the complexity of the human subject – itself the subject of manifold disagreements throughout philosophical history – the inattention to "disability" becomes less surprising. Second, though pervasive in human life, many disabilities are "invisible" and unknown until explicitly revealed. Given the hidden nature of many disabilities, it is less surprising that they have eluded philosophical

[1] The Social Security Administration of the United States of America, for instance, delineates the following as broad categories of disorders that may make adult persons eligible for public assistance: Musculoskeletal Disorders; Special Senses and Speech; Respiratory Disorders; Cardiovascular System; Digestive Disorders; Genitourinary Disorders; Hematological Disorders; Skin Disorders; Endocrine Disorders; Congenital Disorders that Affect Multiple Body Systems; Neurological Disorders; Mental Disorders; Malignant Neoplastic Diseases (i.e. Cancer); and Immune System Disorders. This listing is non-exhaustive and each category includes numerous specific varieties. Thus, one sees the myriad forms that disabilities may take. Further complicating factors for "disability" include whether a given disability is congenital, developmental, or traumatic, whether it is episodic or chronic, what the degree of symptoms are, what existing remedies (if any) are readily accessible, and so forth.

[2] Percentage taken from a report of the World Health Organization, March 7, 2023: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health.

investigation. Third, many disabilities pose challenges to communicating the lived experience of "disability." Indeed, the dependency of persons with certain disabilities has often resulted in marginalization and even, at times, institutionalization. There are, of course, other possible explanations for this disregard, but none excuse overlooking this prominent feature of human life.

Within the last several decades there have been attempts to counter this inattention, most stridently by various advocates of "disability rights" beginning in the 1960s.[3] The consequent academic investigation of "disability" has led to the developing field of "disability studies," which largely groups itself according to various "models." Each "model of disability" serves as an explanatory framework for identifying, understanding, and responding to this reality. Although many different models have been proposed, the present chapter will consider four that have become predominant and, often, serve as the foundation for others.[4] Let us consider each in turn: First, the "Medical Model." This approach regards disability as a disorder, resulting from disease or trauma, to be treated by medical professionals. Understood thus, "disability" needs a cure.[5] Second, the "Social Model." This view maintains that disability is fundamentally a socially created phenomenon. It is not a feature of the individual but of society, and the remedy to inequality is found in social change, not medical treatment.[6] Third, the "Identity Model." Sometimes called the "Affirmation Model," this considers "disability" as the positive identity of individuals, one that makes them out to be the persons that they are, which does not need to be "cured."[7] Fourth, the "Minority Model." A close relative to the "Identity Model" and an elaboration of the "Social Model," this approach maintains that "disability" is the result of negative

[3] See Tom Shakespeare's *Disability: The Basics* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

[4] For an extensive listing of various models and concomitant definitions, see Marno Retief and Rantoa Letšosa, "Models of Disability: A Brief Overview," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 74 (2018): 1–8. See also Dimiris Anastasiou and James M. Kauffman, "The Social Model of Disability: Dichotomy between Impairment and Disability," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 38 (2013): 441–459; Jonas-Sébastein Beaudry, "Beyond (Models of) Disability?" *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 41 (2016): 210–228. For a shorter but insightful treatment, see David Wasserman and Sean Aas, "Disability: Definitions and Models," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2023 Edition).

[5] For a summary of this model, see A. Llewellyn and K. Hogan, "The Use and Abuse of Models of Disability," *Disability & Society* 15 (2000): 157–165, 158.

[6] The social model of disability was, famously, promoted in 1976 in the *Fundamental Principles of Disability* from the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation.

[7] For more about this model, see John Swain and Sally French, "Towards an Affirmation Model of Disability," *Disability & Society* 15 (2000): 569–582.

perceptions and social barriers, in a way akin to the treatment of other minority groups.[8]

While insightful, each is incomplete: Some focus on the *medical* component of disability, others on its *social* implications, and yet others on its *personal* significance, both positive and negative. None succeed in proposing a unified account of disability. In order to do so, one must have, as a point of departure, an anthropology that encompasses human nature, ability, impairment, and dignity. Only with this foundation can one formulate an appropriately inclusive model. The present chapter considers how the philosophical anthropology of Thomas Aquinas might be fruitfully employed toward this end.

Of course, Thomas himself left no treatise on "disability" proper. His discussions of themes related to "disability" (such as sickness or limitation) are usually invoked, in passing, as examples to aid his exposition of some other issue. The present chapter, then, does not intend to present Thomas Aquinas's view of disability but rather to consider how revisiting Thomistic philosophy may enrich contemporary disability studies.[9] Before proposing a "Thomistic Model" of disability, it is first necessary to lay a foundation of Thomistic anthropology, one that has the explanatory principles needed for "disability."

1 Thomistic Anthropology

A survey of the Thomistic corpus reveals substantial considerations of the human being. Key areas of inquiry concern the nature of the soul, the

[8] A significant instance of this view of disability can be found in the *Americans With Disabilities Act* of 1990, which states that "individuals with disabilities are a discrete and insular minority who have been faced with restrictions and limitations, subjected to a history of purposeful unequal treatment, and relegated to a position of political powerlessness in our society, based on characteristics that are beyond the control of such individuals and resulting from stereotypic assumptions not truly indicative of the individual ability of such individuals to participate in, and contribute to, society" (section 2, a, 7).

[9] Thomistic attention to disability studies is now burgeoning. Some notable recent contributions to this area include Bryan R. Cross, "A Thomistic, Non-Ableist Conception of Impairment and Disability," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 20 (2020): 233–242; Miguel J. Romero, "Aquinas on the *corporis infirmitas*: Broken Flesh and the Grammar of Grace," in *Disability in the Christian Tradition: A Reader*, ed. Brian Brock and John Swinton (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 101–151; Terrence Ehrman, "Disability and Resurrection Identity," *New Blackfriars* 96 (2015): 723–738; Richard Cross, "Aquinas on Physical Impairment: Human Nature and Original Sin," *The Harvard Theological Review* 110 (2017): 317–338; John Berkman and Robyn Boeré, "St. Thomas Aquinas on Impairment, Natural Goods, and Human Flourishing," *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 20 (2020): 311–328; Paul Gondreau. "Disability, the Healing of Infirmity, and the Theological Virtue of Hope: A Thomistic Approach," *Journal of Moral Theology* 6 (2017): 70–111.

hylomorphic composition of the human being, the final end of human life, the meaning and importance of virtue and law for human flourishing, and the relation between human creatures and God. These central issues appear, both explicitly and implicitly, throughout Thomas's works. In the first part of his masterful *Summa Theologiae*, for instance, one finds an extended presentation of the human being in questions 75–102, often called his "Treatise on Man." There, Thomas systematically investigates the nature of the human being, the union of body and soul, the powers of the soul, cognition, the creation of the human, and humans' ultimate end. His consideration of the human being, however, is not limited to these questions. *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae considers the final end of human beings, the will, the moral status of human actions, passions, and habits (which includes his account of virtue, vice, and sin), and, finally, law. Each of these topics, to greater or lesser extents, rests on an underlying anthropology, as the prologue to the volume makes clear.[10] *Summa Theologiae* IIaIIae, likewise, concerns the human being inasmuch as it considers, in greater detail, virtues and vices. Thomas begins this section of the *Summa Theologiae* with a presentation of the theological virtues before turning to the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. Acts of virtue, in one way or another, pertain to every human life and, thus, Thomas devotes extensive consideration to them. The final volume of this work, *Summa Theologiae* IIIa, arguably does not depend on anthropology to the same extent as the preceding volumes, but even this section (especially, perhaps, the treatment of sacraments), at least indirectly, assumes an anthropology. Questions regarding the human being are also, of course, not limited to this work.[11]

[10] *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Cincinnati, OH: Benzinger, 1947) IaIIae, prologue: "Since, as Damascene states (De Fide Orth. ii, 12), man is said to be made in God's image, in so far as the image implies 'an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement': now that we have treated of the exemplar, i.e. God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; *it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e. man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions*." Emphasis added.

[11] In the *Summa contra Gentiles*, trans. James F. Anderson (New York: Hanover House, 1955–1957), for instance, Thomas devotes significant effort to establishing an anthropology (especially in part II, chapters 56–90) and then references this account throughout his treatment of other issues. In addition to these two *summae*, Thomas thematized issues of human nature throughout his disputed questions (such as the *De Veritate* and *De Virtutibus*), even dedicating one entirely to such concerns (*Questiones Disputatae de Anima*). Finally, in addition to his independent compositions, one finds issues related to the human being in numerous commentaries, most explicitly in his *Sentencia Libri De anima* (commentary on Aristotle's treatment of the soul) but also at least implicitly in the *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*) and *Sententia libri Politicorum* (commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*).

Simply put, Thomistic anthropology is capacious and probing, not limited to discrete texts but invoked within many contexts and in the course of treating many distinct but related issues. For the purpose of the present chapter, I do not intend to rehearse the entirety of Thomas Aquinas's treatment of the human being. To do so would far exceed the limits of the present study. What is now needed is a distillation of Thomistic anthropology that allows one to approach the issue of "disability" in a holistic way by grounding it in human nature. Drawing inspiration from the preamble to *Summa Theologiae* Ia, qu. 75 – the opening question in what has come to be the *locus classicus* of Thomistic anthropology – I will focus on the division of the human being into essence, powers, and operations. Very simply put, in Thomistic anthropology an individual is a human being inasmuch as this being has a particular kind of nature or essence. Given this essence, a human person has certain natural powers that, if other requisite conditions are met, allow the person to perform certain operations. Let us parse each of these elements, then turn to how they can shed light on "disability."

1.1 Essence

When offering an account of the essence of a "human being," Thomas frequently employs two distinct but related sets of principles: the four causes and the categories.[12] Using these principles, he explains that the human being is a substance, composed of matter and form, that exists as a particular kind of being. Among hylomorphic substances, there is a fundamental difference between living and non-living. In order to emphasize this difference, Thomas uses particular terminology to refer to the form and matter of a living thing: The form of a living thing is termed "soul" and the matter of the living thing is termed "body." While distinct, the four causes and the categories are not unrelated. Form, for one, can be divided into either a substantial form or an accidental form. A substantial form is what makes a given thing exist as a particular kind of thing. An accidental form is what makes a given substance exist in a certain way.

[12] Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 75, art. 1–2 and 4–5 and *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 76. See also Thomas Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de anima*, trans. John Patrick Rowan (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1949), a. 6; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 50; *In I Sent.*, ed. Roberto Busa (Parma: Petrus Fiaccadori, 1858), dist. 8, qu. 5, a. 2; *In II Sent*, dist. 17, a. 1, a. 2; *Quodl.*, III (Rome: Commissio Leonina, 1996), qu. 8, a. 1; IX, qu. 4, a. 1; *De spiritualibus. creaturis*, trans. Mary C. Fitzpatrick and John J. Wellmuth (Milwaukee, MI: Marquette University Press, 1949), a. 1; a. 9 ad 9; *De substantis. separatis*, trans. Francis J. Lescoe (West Hartford, CT: Saint Joseph College, 1959), ch. 7.

Using the causes and the categories, Thomas presents the soul as the substantial form of the human being, that which makes a human being exist as a particular kind of thing. Understanding the soul as, simply put, the form of a living being leads Thomas to maintain that all living things are ensouled.[13] Thus, in his view, not only humans but also plants and animals have souls. To distinguish the different *kinds* of living things, he invokes the notion of "powers."

1.2 Powers

In Thomistic anthropology, any given living being has various abilities or capacities that are termed "powers." Powers are *actual* insofar as they are real features of the living thing but *potential* because they are not always in activity. There are five genera of powers, each of which includes a variety of more specific abilities: vegetative powers, sensitive powers, appetitive powers, locomotive powers, and intellectual powers.[14] Living things that possess the vegetative powers are, of course, commonly termed "plants." But, though all living things perform these vital activities, some living things have further abilities. Living things that possess, in addition, the sensitive power can perform all of the vital activities of plants and also perform acts of sensation. Living things that possess the sensitive power also have the appetitive power, inasmuch as appetite is a response to a sensed object. It is the possession of sensitive and appetite powers (and, in most instances, the locomotive power[15]) that distinguishes "animals" from "plants." Finally, there are some living things that possess the powers of "plants" and "animals" but also additionally possess intellectual abilities: namely, "humans." Thomas thus proposes a hierarchical account of living beings, an account ordered according to the various powers a given kind of being possesses.

No matter what kind of living thing one is considering, powers are always, ultimately, grounded in the essence of the thing. Thomas's way of explaining this relation is to refer to the soul as the "first act" of the living thing (i.e. that act by which this thing exists) and the powers as "second acts" (i.e. real features of a living thing that depend on the existence of that thing).[16] It is important to note that, for Thomas, a "power" may be active

[13] Compare *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 75, a. 1.
[14] This enumeration can be found in Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia q. 78, a. 1, sed contra and respondeo.
[15] Compare *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 78, a. 1, respondeo.
[16] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 77, a. 1, respondeo. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 77, a. 6.

or passive, insofar as a living thing has abilities both to perform activities and to have activities done to them.[17] Although examples of active powers are what, perhaps, often come to mind (such as the power of actively walking, actively talking, and so forth), "power" includes also the abilities that a thing has to have something done to it. For instance, any living being has the power of augmentation (i.e. growth); this is not something that the living thing *does* but rather *undergoes*. Of course, a living thing might perform actions that lead to growth (consuming nutrients, training muscles, and so forth), but growth, considered in itself, is something that happens *to* the living thing, not something the living thing directly *does* (the way a living being might walk or talk). This is important because, even if a person does not perform *active* operations, a person still undergoes *passive* operations. So, even in extreme cases such as total paralysis or coma, persons *inasmuch as they are alive* are, in fact, making use of powers, powers that they possess inasmuch as they are the *kind* of thing that they are.

1.3 Operations

Finally, we come to "operations." These refer to the various activities that result when the potential of a power becomes actual. For example, currently I am sitting and writing this chapter. I am not actually walking but, even though I am not *now* walking, I *could* do so. My power of writing is currently being actualized into the operation of writing, while my power of walking is not *actualized* (because I am not walking) but in *potency* (because I *could*). Should I decide to take a break from writing and take a walk, my operation of writing would cease, my power of writing would return to potency, and my power of walking would come out of potency and into actuality. Even when not in operation, one should not hesitate to affirm that I do, in fact, still have the *power* to walk. If I did *not* have the power, then I would not have the potential to walk. If I did not have the potential to walk, I would never actually walk. Clearly, this is not the case.

But say that something happens that results in my entering a coma. Clearly, in this situation, I am not going to bring my potency to walk into actuality as easily or quickly as I may now when I am simply sitting at a desk. Persons who are in comas, however, can and do come out of them and, though physical rehabilitation is often needed to restore muscle loss, they can and do actualize their potencies to walk. The point of this hypothetical is simple: Someone has a power based on *what kind* of

[17] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 77, a. 3, respondeo.

being they are. This power may be in potency momentarily or for an extended period of time (or, indeed, indefinitely), but operations follow the potency of a being; they do not make a being to be the kind of thing that it is.[18]

At this point, one may object that, even if certain powers (such as the power of walking or writing) go back and forth between potency and actuality, some powers (i.e. powers) *must* be operative if a given living being is to stay alive. While assuredly some powers are more closely related to the existence of a thing (e.g. the power of respiration or circulation), even *these* are not *always* in operation. If one holds their breath or if one's heart stops beating, that does *not* mean that they are no longer human or, indeed, that they are no longer alive. The very fact that respiration and circulation *can* resume proves that there is still an underlying potency to these operations. This potency is the result of an individual's powers, possessed inasmuch as this individual is the kind of being that it is.

1.4 Person

Before turning to consider a "Thomistic Model" of disability directly, one further anthropological concept must be explored: the "person." Thus far, I have drawn no distinction between "human *being*" and "human *person*." Such variance in terminology is fully consonant with Thomistic anthropology but requires some explanation and defense today. In contemporary philosophy (especially various bioethical debates regarding beginning- and end-of-life decisions), there is often insistence on a difference between the "human *being*" and "human *person*." In this division, only the latter possess intrinsic dignity, has moral status, and merits legal rights. A common basis for drawing this distinction is the possession of capacities, such that a thing may be "human" but not yet fully a "human person" inasmuch as it is genetically human but not yet capable of exercising certain essential functions of human life.[19] Suggestions that there is a distinction between the "human being" and the "human person" often invoke, in one way or another, the distinction between essence, powers, and operations. But any invocation of powers or operations to depersonalize a being that is a human

[18] Compare *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 77, a, 1.

[19] This distinction is, often, made by proponents of elective abortion, many of whom grant that a foetus is human but deny that a foetus is a person with rights to life. An example of this distinction can be found in Mary Anne Warren, "On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion," *The Monist* 57 (1973): 43–61.

substance is foreign to Thomistic anthropology. Given the importance of this point, it must now be further explored.

Thomas classically defines the "person" as "an individual substance of a rational nature."[20] In this definition, there are three indispensable elements: (i) "substance," (ii) "individual," and (iii) "rational nature." Let us consider each in turn. First, a person in this view is, fundamentally, a *substance* composed of matter and form. Like all substances, the person does not only exist; the person exists as a certain *kind*; that is, with a certain nature possessed on account of its substantial form (i.e. soul). Inasmuch as this being is a substance, furthermore, it *exists* on its own such that it has a metaphysical wholeness or unity. Second, a person is an *individual*. Although, Thomas notes, universality and particularity can be found in every genus (e.g. in the genus "animal," there are the less general species of "dogs" and "ducks"), an individual goes beyond particularity and specifies the individual within a genus and species (i.e. "Marty," an individual dog now laying asleep at my feet).[21] The human substance, inasmuch as it is subsistent, is an individual. While matter (body) and form (soul) allows one to grasp what *kind* of being an individual is, "person" allows one to grasp that they are a unique *instantiation* of this kind. Third, the human person is a being of a *rational nature*. Reason, for Thomas, is what distinguishes humans from other kinds of animals. Inasmuch as we are rational, we not only possess the powers of intellect and will (which allow us to perform rational activities) but indeed *are* rational beings.[22] Thus, humans are individuals of a natural kind that is different from other natural kinds. Importantly, the definition of person is *not* "an individual substance who performs rational operations" but rather "an individual substance *of a rational nature*." In other words, this is an essential, not operational, definition.[23] It is not a definition based on powers or operations or powers but on *essence*.

[20] Thomas is here drawing on the classical definition of Boethius and adopting it as his own. I note that, understood in this way, human beings are not the only persons. Any substance of a rational nature – such as angels or the three Persons of the Trinity – is a person. For the purposes of the present study, however, one need not parse out the difference between *human* persons and *nonhuman* persons.

[21] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 29, a. 1, respondeo.

[22] It is rationality, I should note, which leads Thomas to argue subsequently that human persons are made in the *imago Dei*, a theme explored throughout *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 93.

[23] For an excellent treatment of the disadvantages – even dangers – of defining the person in terms of his or her operations, see J. Budziszewski, *The Line through the Heart: Natural Law as Fact, Theory, and Sign of Contradiction* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014), esp. ch. 6 :"Thou Shalt Not Kill . . . Whom? The Meaning of the Person."

The distinction and relation between essence, powers, and operations just reviewed allow Thomistic anthropology to identify what a human being *is*, what a human being is naturally *capable* of, and what a human being does, in fact, *do*. Human nature in the Thomistic view, then, incorporates the distinction between essence, powers, and operations by uniting them into a singular kind of being: the human person. Every living thing exists as a particular kind of thing, an individual of a particular kind of essence shared in common with other like individuals. These particular kinds of essences have, as inseparable concomitants, various powers. The threefold division of living beings into plants, animals, and humans uses an identification of *powers* to explain this distinction. A living thing possesses these powers only inasmuch as it is a certain *kind*. In other words, one is not *what* one is because of one's powers but rather possesses these powers because of what one *is*.

The soul is the first actuality of the living thing, that which makes this thing to exist in actuality, while powers are second actualities: real features of a given *kind* of living thing that does not account for its actuality as a living substance. Powers are the means by which a living thing performs distinctive activities but, because powers lie in potency to the actualization of operation, operations may cease and resume without affecting the *essence* of the living thing. Human beings are distinguished from other *kinds* of living things inasmuch as humans are constituted by a different kind of *essence* that, in turn, results in the possession of various powers and, at times, subsequent distinctive activities and reactivates.

Proponents of the distinction between "human being" and "human person" will often invoke capacities for certain vital operations as benchmark requirements for any given being to be considered a person. For Thomas, however, a being *inasmuch as it is the kind of being that it is* possesses powers. If a being *lacks* a given power, then *it is not that kind of being*. Thus, if a being lacks the power of reason, then this being is not a human but, if a being is human, then it possesses the power of reason. Of course, Thomas does *not* maintain that every being that possesses the power of reason is able, at all times or at all points of development or in all periods of life, to perform rational *operations*. There can be impediments (either temporary or persistent, developmental or traumatic) that hinder natural operations. But, insofar as the individual is an individual of a given natural kind it possesses, in potency, the natural abilities that all individuals of this kind possess. Thus, the distinction between "human being" and "human person" is foreign to a Thomistic anthropology inasmuch as both "human beings" and "human persons" are both, by nature, *individual substances* of a particular kind of *nature*. This definition of "person" relies on the *essence* of a being rather than *powers* or *operations*.

2 Disability and Thomistic Anthropology

Although prominent in human experience, "disability" can be surprisingly difficult to define. The complexity of this reality has led to the formulation of a variety of "models," some of which were rehearsed at the beginning of this chapter. While insightful, these definitions of "disability" are inadequate on their own: Some focus on its *medical* component, others on *social* implications, and yet others on *personal* significance. None yet succeed in proposing an essential and unified definition of this complex reality. Some, recognizing the inherent limitations of these various approaches, have responded by denying that any given model can be complete. Llewellyn and Hogan, for instance, in their study "The Use and Abuse of Models of Disability," claim that

> Models are useful as a tool to aid understanding of different aspects of disability for research and clinical purposes, but there is a danger that if models are adopted unchallenged then implicit definitions will presuppose answers to questions. Models of human life will always have significant limitations because their representation of their subject matter cannot be other than partial and imprecise.[24]

Given their acceptance of models as limited, partial, and imprecise, they claim that "models" cannot be "true" but rather only representative of a given approach or data set.[25] While acknowledging the limitations of various predominant models of "disability," the present chapter does not accept that *any* or *all* models must be only and always "partial and imprecise." To arrive at a holistic account of disability, one that is able to overcome certain limitations of these approaches, then we must have an anthropological foundation upon which to build. This is what the present chapter proposes. Invoking the schema just presented of essence, powers, and operations, we are now able to propose a Thomistic account of disability.

[24] A. Llewellyn and K. Hogan, "The Use and Abuse of Models of Disability," *Disability & Society* 15 (2000): 157–165, 164.

[25] Llewellyn and Hogan, "The Use and Abuse of Models of Disability," 157: "It is important to remember that models may help to generate an explanation in some way, but they do not themselves constitute an explanation. Disconfirming evidence is damaging to a theory, but not so for a model. This should not present problems if it is borne in mind that models cannot be 'true', but are merely representations that are not in themselves based upon data collection or methodology. One of the essential features of a model is the application of one (better understood and developed) system to another (less well understood and developed) system."

2.1 *"Disability" and "Impairment"*

Recall that a human being is the kind of thing that it is inasmuch as it has a particular kind of soul. Given that this being has *this* kind of soul and not any other, this being possesses a variety of powers. Powers, considered in themselves, are in potency to operations. The essence of a being is *not* constituted by its operations (because these may be transient) but by what kind of *soul* it has. In disability studies, these natural powers are, more commonly, referred to as "abilities." So, in a Thomistic philosophy of disability, "abilities" refer to the natural powers that a given individual possesses inasmuch as it is a human. At this point, given the complexities of "disability" and the disparate foci of the models of disability presented at the beginning of this study, it would be helpful to introduce an additional clarifying term: "impairment."[26]

In order to account for the vast implications of "disability," I propose that "impairment" be used in a restricted sense to refer to the inability of an individual, for whatever reason, to actualize powers (or abilities) into operations. Disability, by contrast, is a broader term and encompasses the various concomitant personal or social challenges that a person with such impairment may or does experience as a result of an impairment. Understood this way, both "impairment" and "disability" refer to the same objective reality, but the focus and scope of these terms differ.[27] "Impairment" refers to the lack (to any degree) of any physiological or psychological element that is an essential concomitant of the essence of a human being (in other words, some natural power). The focus and

[26] An additional, related, term that is sometimes used within studies of disability is "handicap." Like "disability," this term can have a variety of meanings depending on context, author, country, and other variables. The World Health Organization offered in "The International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps" (1980) the following definitions: "a disadvantage for a given individual that limits or prevents the fulfillment of a role that is normal. As traditionally used, impairment refers to a problem with a structure or organ of the body; disability is a functional limitation with regard to a particular activity; and handicap refers to a disadvantage in filling a role in life relative to a peer group." Some authors have critiqued these distinctions (see, for instance, S. D. Edwards, "Dismantling the Disability/Handicap Distinction," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 22 (1997): 589–606 and a response from Lennart Nordenfelt, "The Importance of a Disability/Handicap Distinction," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 22 (1997): 607–622). There are widely varying reactions to the term "handicap," some persons accepting it as a designator of personal identity or state of being while others reject it as outmoded and offensive. The present study will restrict its focus to the meaning of "impairment" and "disability" as these are more widely accepted and used.

[27] For some discussions of these terms, see Dimitris Anastasiou and James M. Kauffman, "The Social Model of Disability: Dichotomy between Impairment and Disability," *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy* 38 (2013): 441–459 and Edmund Coleman-Fountain and Janice McLaughlin, "The Interactions of Disability and Impairment," *Social Theory & Health* 11 (2013): 133–150.

scope of "impairment" are, thus, the objective identification and acknowledgment of a given condition. The focus of "disability" is on the inequity following impairment, entailing that the scope of "disability" is broader than "impairment" but deeply connected to it.[28] An illustration may help: A person who has a significant hearing loss has a hearing *impairment*. This impairment marks the inability (or, at least, a greatly reduced ability) to activate the power of hearing (possessed inasmuch as this person is a human) and to hear through a particular kind of operation. This impairment has a subsequent element of *disability* inasmuch as this impairment leads, often, to personal and social challenges, especially communication barriers.

Of course, there are innumerable causes and instances of a given human person being unable to actualize a power into operation, either temporarily (such as when one is asleep or has a broken foot) or persistently (such as my inability to run a mile in less than four minutes). But if "disability" were to be used to refer to a multitude of instances such as these, then one runs the risk of minimizing the seriousness of disability by making it commonplace. It is certainly, at times, important to remind ourselves that every human exists somewhere on a spectrum of limitation and dependency, as doing so allows persons without obvious impairments to identify and empathize with persons with disabilities. But it is important to safeguard "disability" as a special, not general, category if appropriate consideration and accommodations are to be accorded. Thus, some distinctions should be made.

First, disability implies a state or condition that persists for a significant amount of time and to an extent that necessitates or warrants intervention or accommodations. Understood this way, temporary states such as sleep or having a broken bone are not "disabilities" in the sense of concern to disability advocates. They are, instead, interruptions that occur in the normal course of human life, some of which require temporary accommo-

[28] I note that this distinction is consonant with the definitions offered in the WHO document "International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps" (1980). Here "impairment" is defined as "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function" and "disability" is defined as "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being." See also C. Barnes, *Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination* (London: Hurst and Co., 1991), 2: "*Impairment* is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment. *Disability* is the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers." See also Anastasiou and Kauffman, "The Social Model of Disability."

dations (such as wearing a cast or using mobility assistance) and some of which do not (under most circumstances, thank goodness, people wake up on their own).

Second, disability is not synonymous with "limitation." Every human being has, and should be aware of, their limitations. It is, indeed, part of being human not to be omniscient, omnipotent, or omnipresent. What distinguishes "limitation" from "impairment" is that limitations are natural to human nature while "impairments" signify an inability to actualize a power in a way that human beings, generally speaking, are able to do. So, for instance, running a mile in less than four minutes is not something that humans, generally speaking, are capable of doing.[29] My "limitation" in being unable to do so thus does not constitute an "impairment." By contrast, humans are, generally speaking, able to walk in some way. A person who is unable to actualize the power of walking that they have as a result of their nature, then, is "impaired" and not merely "limited."

These two distinctions, of course, assume a normative account of human nature. While some disability advocates might reject such a view (accepting, instead, a notion of disabilities as "differences" rather than as departures from a norm), such normativity is central to the Thomistic understanding of disability.[30] The Thomistic emphasis on a normative and essential view of the person as an individual of a particular natural kind leads to another claim that might be rejected: namely, that natural powers are possessed by every human being always, regardless of whether or not any given human will actualize them into operations. Inasmuch as natural powers are possessed inasmuch as one is the kind of being that one is, they persist even in instances of chronic or permanent impairment. In other words, even persons who, realistically, will never regain a certain operation (such as walking or hearing or thinking) nonetheless still possess, essentially, the power (such as to walk or to hear or to think). The claim that powers remain as real features

[29] At the time of writing this chapter, the world records for the mile run were 3:43:13 (Hicham El Guerrouj) for men and 4:07:89 (Faith Kipyegon) for women.

[30] An instance of a "difference" view of disability can be found in Elizabeth Barnes, *The Minority Body: A Theory of Disability* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). For some treatments of this view, see Jerome Bickenbach, "Disability, Health, and Difference," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Disability*, ed. Adam Cureton and David T. Wasserman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); Anita Silvers, "Philosophy and Disability: What Should Philosophy Do?" *Res Philosophica* 93 (2016): 843–863; Nicholas Colgrove, "The (In)Compatibility of the Privation Theory of Evil and the Mere-Difference View of Disability," in *Perspectives on Disability*, ed. Jason T. Eberl, *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* (Summer 2020): 329–348. For a brief but insightful treatment of "mere difference" from a Thomistic point of view, see Cross, "A Thomistic, Non-Ableist Conception of Impairment and Disability," esp. 235–236.

of a given kind of natural thing (i.e. as second acts) even in the absence of actualizations through operation is supported, among other cases, by instances in which one resumes performing a certain operation after previously being unable to do so (e.g. those who were once in a coma or paralyzed to some extent coming back to consciousness or regaining mobility). It is the underlying reality of powers, furthermore, that allows developments in medicine or technology to be effective. Unless there was a *power* present for such development to work on, there could be no *operation*, inasmuch as the lack of a power means the lack of a directed potency. The claim that powers remain even in cases of chronic impairment depends on a normative account of nature.

All this being said, admittedly, it is poor comfort to insist that, for instance, a person who is unable to hear still has the *power* to hear and lacks only the *operation*. Indeed, it verges on the cruel to argue that one *could* hear (because one, by their nature, has the power of hearing) when one will, in all likelihood, never perform the *operation* of hearing (such as in the case of severe hearing loss). A Thomist should in no way advocate such practice. What a Thomistic account must argue, however, is that inasmuch as one is an individual of a certain kind, there is a power present. The Thomistic emphasis is on the *essence* of the individual, not the ability or inability to perform a particular *operation*.

At this point, it bears emphasizing that the definitions of "impairment" and "disability" presently proposed are framed in negative terms only in reference to an aspect of an individual person. These are *not* directed toward the *person*. One must be able to identify, objectively, impairments if one is to work toward appropriate remedies. One must, similarly, acknowledge the objective inequity of disability if one is to work toward needed social change. In other words, "disability" in the Thomistic account is not a neutral mere difference. Disability in a broad sense, and impairment in a focused sense, refer to something that is a departure from what is natural to an individual inasmuch as this being is a human. Nonetheless, in this Thomistic account, neither impairment nor disability counter the intrinsic and inviolable value and dignity of the person.[31] In this way, the Thomistic emphasis on normativity does not commit ableism inasmuch as it does not discriminate against any individual. In claiming that "disabilities" refer, fundamentally, to inequities that follow impairments, a Thomistic account of disability does

[31] Cross offers in his study an excellent treatment of possible "ableism" objections to a Thomistic account of impairment. See Cross, "A Thomistic, Non-Ableist Conception of Impairment and Disability," esp. 238–239.

not intend to downplay their significance. The human person is, inasmuch as he or she is human, also a social being.[32] So, while the human's essence and dignity are untouched by disability, the inequities that one experiences as a result of impairment can be a significant challenge to flourishing. In the Thomistic account, one *should* work toward inclusion of persons with disabilities *because* of the objective nature of inequity.

2.2 A Thomistic Model of Disability

Using the standard vernacular of contemporary disability studies, the account of disability being proposed in the present chapter is a new "model." This "Thomistic Model of Disability," like the models summarized at the beginning of this study, offers a descriptive framework for understanding a complex reality. It does not, however, stop at description but instead attempts to ground "disability" within an anthropology. By contextualizing "disability" (and, for that matter, "impairment") within an account of the human person, it proposes an essential and unified definition of disability. Thus, this model intends to give a truthful account of "disability" that unifies the insights of other models while avoiding some of their limitations. This proposed return to Thomistic anthropology, thus, responds to the disparate concerns of the current mainstream models of "disability." Let us consider each in turn.

First, this model allows an identification of impairment as a departure from the norm of healthy functioning. The insistence of the Medical Model on disability as a disorder in need of medical intervention is admitted by the Thomistic understanding of "impairment." Unlike the Medical Model, however, the Thomistic understanding of "disability" is not limited to impairment, nor does it maintain that the remedy to inequities experienced by persons with disabilities is always or only medical. Importantly, too, the Thomistic understanding now proposed regards impairment as a feature of the person but not an essential difference. In other words, a diagnosis of impairments does not apply to the *person* as

[32] While I do not follow Kittay in her conclusions regarding the social import of impairment, care, and disability, her studies offer helpful complements to the account of disability that I am offering. See Eva Feder Kittay, "At The Margins of Moral Personhood," *Ethics* 116 (2005): 100–131 and "Equality, Dignity and Disability," in *Perspectives on Equality: The Second Seamus Heaney Lectures*, ed. M. A. Lyons and F. Waldron (Dublin: The Liffey Press, 2005), 93–119. Another significant treatment of the social and essential meaning of disability is, of course, Alasdair MacIntyre's *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues* (Chicago, IL: Carus Publishing Company, 1999). See also Shane Clifton, *Crippled Grace: Disability, Virtue Ethics, and the Good Life* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), esp. ch. 6.

a whole but to an aspect of the person. Impairments can be classified as "abnormal" or regarded as departures from the norm without making the *person* an abnormality.

Second, a Thomistic model acknowledges the social aspect of human life and allows one to identify the seriousness of inequities within society for an individual's flourishing. The anthropological grounding for this conception of disability includes reference to the social nature of the human being. As such, human beings require socialization, in some way or another, for their flourishing. The social implications of disability of concern to the "Social Model," thus, are accounted for in the Thomistic model's underlying anthropology.

Third, the Thomistic model relies on an account of the person as an individual substance of a particular kind of nature. An emphasis on the human being's individuality is, of course, the concern of the "Identity Model." Recognizing the person as an individual substance allows the Thomistic model to incorporate all aspects of the person as individual, impairment and consequent disabilities included. Significantly, however, the Thomistic model does not make impairment or disability the basis for one's individuality but rather a feature of it. In other words, one is not an individual because of the disability that one has, nor does the disability make the individual to be the kind of being that it is. Rather, a human is an individual of a particular natural kind – an essence that pertains equally to *all* individuals of this kind – who may, in turn, possess various impairments or experience various disabilities. Thus, human persons are *essentially* a particular kind of being who, as unique instantiations of this kind, may be shaped but not determined by their disabilities.

Fourth and finally, the anthropology of the Thomistic model offers robust support for condemning discrimination against persons with disabilities. The injustice of "othering" persons who, for whatever reason, are unable to perform normative operations is, of course, of paramount concern to the "Minority Model." The Thomistic insistence on the inviolable value and dignity of persons inasmuch as they are *persons* and not inasmuch as they perform operations entails that they be treated with respect and equally valued.

3 Conclusion

In order to guard against mistaken conflations of *nature* and *operation* – such that persons with disabilities are regarded as inferior *disabled persons* rather than respected as *persons* with *disabilities* – one must begin with

a correct anthropology. The present chapter has argued that it is only within this context that "disability" can be adequately defined and appropriately treated. In the Thomistic anthropology just offered, a human being is an individual of a particular kind of nature. Given this nature, the person has certain natural abilities that, if requisite conditions are met, allow the individual to perform certain operations. Should there be some impediment to natural operations, the individual has an "impairment" and, subsequently, has a "disability" inasmuch as this impairment leads to inequalities. Although persons, in this anthropological account, have inalienable dignity and deserve regard insofar as they are the kind of being that they are, the "Thomistic Model" recognizes that inabilities to perform natural operations can pose significant challenges to human flourishing. As such, disability must be acknowledged and understood if one is to treat others with appropriate respect and remedy certain injustices. Given the complexity of disability, there are, indubitably, related issues that remain unaddressed by the present chapter. Nonetheless, this "Thomistic model" offers resources to anyone concerned with this aspect of human life and, in so doing, evidences the value of revisiting Thomism.

CHAPTER 7

Feminism and Thomism

Jordan McFadden

At first glance, Thomism and feminism seem like unlikely bedfellows. It is well known that Aquinas says a number of unflattering things about women, such as that women are weaker in reason than men and naturally subject to men.[1] Following Aristotle, he states that women are "deficient and inadvertent" relative to the human species.[2] Given these comments, one could be forgiven for seeking elsewhere for a philosophical interlocutor regarding feminist concerns.

In spite of the apparent incongruity, I argue that a fruitful dialogue can exist between Aquinas and feminism, particularly regarding the relationship between the body and reason. To this end, I make three points. First, I argue that Aquinas's anthropology provides a fertile ground for a discussion of women's nature and flourishing, and I summarize the work that has been done to date in this area.

Second, I argue that there is a surprising degree of similarity between the attitude of Thomas toward the female body and the attitude of certain contemporary feminists, of which I take Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone as representative. All three of these authors recognized that women are more affected by their bodies than men are, and all three saw this as a source of inequality between men and women.

Third, I evaluate Aquinas's implied argument that women's bodies render them less rational than men. I argue that, while Aquinas is wrong to conclude that women are less rational than men, it is nonetheless true that women experience more frequent interruptions to their ability to exercise their highest powers to the fullest capacity because they experience more pain and fatigue related to the specific nature of the female body.

[1] See, e.g., *Super I Tim.*, c. 2, lec. 2 in *Super Epistolas S. Pauli lectura*, vol. 2, *Super primam Epistolam ad Timotheum lectura* (Turin: Marietti, 1953); *Summa Theologiae* (Rome: Leonine, 1888–1906), Ia qu. 92, art. 1 ad 2.

[2] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 92, art. 1 ad 1.

Finally, I consider how the nature of the female body may dispose women to exercising their reason slightly differently than men do. In particular, I consider the evidence that women are both more skilled in both cognitive and affective empathy and more interested in human beings than men are.[3] I then argue that this tendency is at least partially caused by the biology specific to the female body.

1 Hylomorphism and Feminism

Although Aquinas's few explicit comments about women are largely negative, I will briefly argue that his anthropology provides an apt foundation for a discussion of the nature of women and their flourishing. Aquinas holds a version of hylomorphism, the metaphysical theory first articulated by Aristotle and developed in various ways by his followers. As such, he holds that human beings are composed of body and rational soul and that both principles are equally essential to our humanity. Although all human beings share the same kind of soul with the same set of capacities, all powers of the soul are realized in and through a body.[4] From this position, we can infer that our material conditions, including biological sex, influence the way in which we actualize our powers.

Some authors have already noted the aptness of hylomorphism for a fruitful discussion of the nature of women and sex differentiation. Prudence Allen has noted that hylomorphism enables one to hold together equality and difference with regard to the two sexes.[5] All human beings are equal in virtue of having the same kind of human soul with the same set of powers; however, the two sexes differ importantly insofar as all these powers are actualized through sexually differentiated matter. Similarly, Sarah Borden Sharkey has noted that hylomorphism in general provides a way to navigate a path between biological determinism and pure constructivism. Since all or nearly all powers of the soul are realized in and through the body, biological conditions, including sex, influence the way in which we develop our powers. On the other hand, the higher powers of the human soul, such as reason, are realized not only in a given biological

[3] I intend all such claims about women's tendencies to apply to women taken as a whole. Thus, these claims are compatible with the existence of exceptions.

[4] In the present life at any rate. Although Aquinas holds that the power of reason can function without the body, in the present life reason is still exercised in and through the body.

[5] Prudence Allen, *The Concept of Woman*, vol. 3, *The Search for Communion of Persons, 1500–2015* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 796.

context but also in a given social and cultural context. Thus, social conditions likewise influence the way we develop our higher powers.[6]

As one of the most developed versions of hylomorphism, Thomas's anthropology is worth exploring as an interlocutor with feminism. Thomists are best served not by focusing on Aquinas's explicit comments about women, which, at any rate, are few and far between, but rather on what we can say about women and the sex difference in light of his anthropology.

2 Female Bodies and Reason: Three Authors' Reflections

I argue that there is a surprising degree of similarity between the attitude of Thomas toward the female body and the attitude of certain contemporary feminists, of which I will discuss Simone de Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone. All three of these authors recognized that women are more affected by their bodies than men are, and all three of them saw this as a source of inequality between men and women.

Simone de Beauvoir is best known for her view that socially constructed gender, not biological sex, is the primary impediment to women's equality. Nonetheless, she does seem to acknowledge the role the body plays in the situation of women in her enormously influential work, *The Second Sex*. In the first chapter, she puts forth a phenomenology of woman's body. She describes the pain, and, in some cases, danger that comes with the bodily changes stemming from women's reproductive capacity. She meticulously traces the negative effects that many women experience during puberty, menstruation, pregnancy, breastfeeding, and menopause. Further, she notes that women are more prone to illness, and in many cases this proneness is related to their reproductive capacity. As she summarizes: "Crises of puberty and of the menopause, monthly 'curse', long and often troubled pregnancy, illnesses and accidents are characteristic of the human female: her destiny appears even more fraught the more she rebels against it by affirming herself as an individual . . . Women live, on average, as long as men, but are often sick and indisposed."[7] Strangely, at the end of this analysis, de Beauvoir denies that biology itself is a source of inequality. However, it is hard to avoid the impression that her phenomenological analysis of the female body supports the conclusion that biology plays a role in women's subjection, even if it is not the only or primary cause of it.

[6] Sarah Borden Sharkey, *An Aristotelian Feminism* (Cham: Springer, 2016), ch. 2.
[7] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (London: Random House, 1993), 44.

Shulamith Firestone developed de Beauvoir's analysis in precisely this direction, arguing that biology is the primary source of inequality between men and women. She notes that prior to the development of highly effective methods of contraception, women were "at the continual mercy of their biology." In addition to puberty, menstruation, menopause, and illnesses, women in times past experienced constant cycles of pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding. Further, human infants take far longer to become independent compared to other animals, and their care usually falls mainly or exclusively to women. Because of these realities, most women throughout history became dependent on men for their survival. She concludes: "Although, as De Beauvoir points out, [the sex difference] did not necessitate the development of a class system – the domination of one group by another – the reproductive functions of these differences did."[8] Firestone proceeds to argue for the use of technology to eradicate the burdens of childbearing as much as possible in order to erase the social distinction between the two sexes. Only under such circumstances, she believes, can equality be achieved.

Aquinas also sees women's inequality as linked to their bodies.[9] While he does not articulate this claim explicitly, I think it can be plausibly constructed from premises that he does explicitly hold. Aquinas thinks women are inferior to men because they are weaker in reason.[10] However, as a hylomorphist, he holds that all human beings have the same kind of soul and thus the same potency for reason. Any difference in the ability to exercise reason must come from a difference in the body or matter. Thus, if women as a whole are less rational than men as a whole, this difference must come from some deficiency intrinsic to the female body.[11]

[8] Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex* (New York: Verso, 2015), 17.

[9] Of course, unlike de Beauvoir and Firestone, he does not see inequality between men and women as an injustice to be rectified but as a fundamental fact. Following Aristotle, Aquinas holds that women are "deficient and inadvertent" relative to human nature; however, he adds that relative to nature as a whole, women are not inadvertent, but ordered by the intention of nature, and therefore by God, who is the cause of the intention of nature. It follows that, for Aquinas, women's very inequality is intended by God. Further, he thought a sort of inequality, one directed to the good of the subjected party, existed between men and women even in the state of innocence. See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 92, art. 1 ad 1–2.

[10] See, e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 92, art. 1 ad 2; *Super I Tim.*, c. 2, lec. 2.

[11] For a discussion of Aquinas's reasons for concluding women are weaker in reason, including the role of biology in this reasoning, see Eric Johnston, "The Biology of Marriage," *The Thomist* 77 (2013): 577–616, at 587–594.

Somewhat more speculatively, I think Aquinas likely sees women's deficiency in reason as linked to the constant flux of their bodies. He consistently holds that bodily motion impedes reason. For example, he states that sleep, inebriation, and forceful passions bind reason due to the motions these cause in the body.[12] Further, it seems empirically obvious that women experience more bodily change than men do: All women of childbearing age are in a constant state of hormonal shift, and these changes would have been evident even before modern science revealed their biological causes. Although Aquinas does not discuss the flux of women's bodies explicitly, the Aristotelian association of women with matter, which he accepts, seems to reflect this reality: form is the principle of being and constancy; matter is the principle of becoming and change. Thus, to associate women with matter is to associate women with flux.[13]

Thus, it seems plausible that Aquinas took the constant flux of women's bodies to entail that women are less rational than men.[14] At any rate, given his metaphysics of the human person, he must have seen women's lesser rationality as stemming from her body in some way. Given that the female body has often been seen in a negative light, as it is in the thinkers discussed above, it is hardly surprising that certain feminists have sought to downplay the significance of the body.[15] Thus, in the final section, I will consider both whether there is any truth to the claim that women's bodies are a cause of inequality and whether there is any more positive effect of the changing nature of a woman's body.

[12] On the lack of the use of reason in sleep, see *Scriptum super libros Sententiarum magistri Petri Lombardi Episcopi Parisiensis*, ed. Pierre Mandonnet and Marie Fabien Moos (Paris: Lethielleux, 1929–1947), Lib. IV, dist. 9, qu. 1, art. 4, qc. 1; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (Rome: Leonine, 1970–1976), qu. 28, art. 3 ad 7; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84, art. 8, co, ad 2. For the motion of humours as the cause of lack of reason in sleep, see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84, art. 8, co, ad 2; for the motion of humors as impeding reason in the sleeping and drunk, see *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* (Rome: Leonine, 1982), qu. 3, art. 4, co ll. 134–139. For bodily motions binding reason in the sleeping, drunk, or those in the grip of a passions, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 48, art. 3; qu. 77, art. 2. In those in the grip of a passion or inebriated, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 33, art. 3.

[13] Compare IV *Sent*. dist. 36, qu. 1, art. 4 arg. and ad 2; *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 26, art. 10 ad. 2; *Sententia libri ethicorum* (Rome: Leonine, 1969), lib. VIII, lec. 12, n. 1710. For the source of this idea in Aristotle, see *De generatione animalium* I. 20 729a9ff; II.4 738b20; IV.1 765b10.

[14] To be clear, I am not suggesting such an argument constitutes the entirety of Aquinas's reasons for holding women to be less rational than men; his reasons were likely complex, and the prejudices of the medieval worldview were certainly a factor.

[15] See the discussion in Borden Sharkey, *An Aristotelian Feminism* (Cham: Springer, 2016), 16–33.

3 The Positive and Negative Effects of the Female Body on Reason

In the previous section, I argued that implied argumentation can be found in the corpus of Aquinas supporting his conclusion that women are less rational than men:

(At least some) bodily fluctuations impede the use of reason.
Women experience more fluctuations in the body than men.
Therefore, women are less rational than men.

I will now evaluate this argumentation. Aquinas holds that certain bodily motions impede the use of reason, such as those associated with sleep, inebriation, and intense passions. However, he apparently does not think that all bodily motions impede reason; for example, he allows that more moderate passions, such as sadness and fear, can improve the use of reason, even though all passions properly speaking involve a bodily motion.[16] He sometimes calls those motions that impede reason "disturbances" (*perturbationes*) and suggests that they bind reason due to their intensity.[17] There are two relevant questions we can ask regarding this claim: (1) Is it true that certain bodily motions, such as violent ones, impede the use of reason? (2) If so, are the motions of the female body of such a kind to impede the use of reason? Regarding the first, we can say that the claim itself that violent bodily motions impede the use of reason, which has roots in Aristotle's biology, is not entirely accurate; it is not the intensity of motion per se that impedes reason in the cases of, for example, sleep, inebriation, and old age; rather, it is the way certain bodily changes affect certain parts of the brain. However, given this caveat, it is still true that certain kinds of bodily change impede the use of reason; thus it is worth asking whether the changes intrinsic to the female body are among those that do.

Between puberty and menopause, women are in a near-constant state of hormonal shift. While research on the effects of hormones on the brain is still in nascent stages, it appears that the vast majority of changes do not impact rationality. As evidence of this fact, we might point to the fact that women and men have been consistently found to have nearly identical

[16] For the claim that all passions of the sense appetite involve a bodily motion, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 22, art. 1. For the positive effect of moderate sadness on reason, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 37, art. 1 ad 1. For the positive effect of fear on deliberation, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 44, art. 4.

[17] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 33, art. 3 co; qu. 48, art. 4 co and ad 3; *De Malo*, q. 3 a. 4 co.

average IQ scores.[18] If the hormonal cycle impeded women's reasoning, we would expect women, or at least women of childbearing age, to have lower average IQ scores than men.[19]

There appear to be two minor exceptions; that is, cases in which female hormonal changes negatively impact the use of reason in subtle and temporary ways. First, it appears that verbal recall slightly decreases during late pregnancy and the postpartum period, although there is also some evidence to the contrary.[20] Secondly, and more unambiguously supported by empirical evidence, memory is likewise slightly suppressed during early menopause, although, once again, the changes are subtle, and memory is restored to its pre-menopause levels within a few years.[21] However, since both these changes are minor, and it does not appear that any of other hormonal changes of the female body impede the use of reason, it still seems reasonable to conclude that the changing nature of the female body does not impede reason in any significant way.

Given that the female body does not lessen women's reason, is there any truth to the claim, seemingly suggested by all three authors discussed above, that the female body is an impediment to women's equality? I would suggest two ways: Women experience more pain and more fatigue than men do due to the nature of their bodies. Aquinas acknowledges that

[18] Women score slightly higher on some versions of the test and men score slightly higher on others, but the differences are always small at any rate. See the studies discussed in Nicholas Mackintosh, *IQ and Human Intelligence*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Ian J. Deary, *Intelligence: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[19] While there are many criticisms of the IQ test, and it may well be an imperfect means of measurement, I nonetheless find it informative that men and women consistently have very similar average scores.

[20] Laura M. Glynn, "Giving Birth to a New Brain: Hormone Exposures of Pregnancy Influence Human Memory," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 35 (2010): 1148–1155; Julie D. Henry and Peter G. Rendell, "A Review of the Impact of Pregnancy on Memory Function," *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology* 29 (2007): 793–803. For evidence that pregnancy does not affect memory in any significant way, see Sara Pieters et al., "Working Memory from Pregnancy to Postpartum: Do Women Really Change?" *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 126 (2021): 105169; Helen Christensen, Liana S. Leach, and Andrew Mackinnon, "Cognition in Pregnancy and Motherhood: Prospective Cohort Study," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 196 (2010): 126–132; Elinor Brown and Jonathan Schaffir, "'Pregnancy Brain': A Review of Cognitive Changes in Pregnancy and Postpartum," *Obstetrical & Gynecological Survey* 74 (2019): 178–185. For an attempt to explain the conflicting data, see Sarah J. Ouellette and Elizabeth Hampson, "Memory and Affective Changes during the Antepartum: A Narrative Review and Integrative Hypothesis," *Journal of Clinical and Experimental Neuropsychology* 41 (2019): 87–107.

[21] Miriam T. Weber, Leah H. Rubin, and Pauline M. Maki, "Cognition in Perimenopause: The Effect of Transition Stage," *Menopause* 20 (2013): 511–517; C. Neil Epperson, Mary D. Sammel, and Ellen W. Freeman, "Menopause Effects on Verbal Memory: Findings from a Longitudinal Community Cohort," *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology* 98 (2013) 3829–3838; G. A. Greendale et al., "Effects of the Menopause Transition and Hormone Use on Cognitive Performance in Midlife Women," *Neurology* 72 (2009): 1850–1857.

both pain and tiredness hinder the functioning of reason; further, it seems phenomenologically obvious that this is in fact the case.[22] Thus, we will consider the possibility that, although women can develop their reasoning capacity to the same degree that men do, they may experience more frequent interruptions to the ability to use their highest powers to their full capacity due to more frequent experiences of pain and fatigue.

We will first briefly review the evidence that women experience more pain than men and that this pain is at least partially caused by the female body, not merely by socially motivated factors such as stress. It is well known that the various reproductive functions of the female body often involve pain, including menstrual cramping, morning sickness, the pain of birth, recovery from birth, and so on. In addition, women also are more likely to suffer from several painful health issues. As representative of these health issues, we will consider migraines and autoimmune disease.[23] Although the causes of both migraines and each of the eighty or so autoimmune diseases are likely multifaceted, and each ailment would have to be examined individually in order to determine its precise causes, it does appear that the female biology is a factor in these conditions. Migraine is more common in women of childbearing age than in post-menopausal women, and attacks often coincide with sharp drops in estrogen, such as occurs at the beginning of the menstrual cycle.[24] While the

[22] On pain as an impediment to reason in Aquinas, see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIae qu. 37, a. 1 and 3. On tiredness as an impediment to reason, see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84, art. 7.

[23] On the higher frequency of migraine in women, see T. W. Victor et al., "Migraine Prevalence by Age and Sex in the United States: A Life-Span Study," *Cephalalgia* 30 (2010): 1065–1072; Richard B. Lipton et al., "Migraine in America Symptoms and Treatment (MAST) Study: Baseline Study Methods, Treatment Patterns, and Gender Differences," *Headache* 58 (2018): 1408–1426; Dawn C. Buse et al., "Sex Differences in the Prevalence, Symptoms, and Associated Features of Migraine, Probable Migraine and Other Severe Headache: Results of the American Migraine Prevalence and Prevention (AMPP) Study," *Headache* 53 (2013): 1278–1299; Richard B. Lipton et al., "A Comparison of the Chronic Migraine Epidemiology and Outcomes (CaMEO) Study and American Migraine Prevalence and Prevention (AMPP) Study: Demographics and Headache-Related Disability," *Headache* 56 (2016): 1280–1289; Rachel A. Schroeder et al., "Sex and Gender Differences in Migraine-Evaluating Knowledge Gaps," *Journal of Women's Health* 27 (2018): 965–973. On the higher frequency of autoimmune disease in women, see M. A. Dooley and S. L. Hogan, "Environmental Epidemiology and Risk Factors for Autoimmune Disease," *Current Opinion in Rheumatology* 15 (2003): 99–103; Norbert Gleicher and David H. Barad, "Gender as Risk Factor for Autoimmune Diseases," *Journal of Autoimmunity* 28 (2007): 1–6; Denise L. Jacobson et al., "Epidemiology and Estimated Population Burden of Selected Autoimmune Diseases in the United States," *Clinical Immunology and Immunopathology* 84 (1997): 223–243; Glinda S. Cooper and Berrit C. Stroehla, "The Epidemiology of Autoimmune Diseases," *Autoimmunity Reviews* 2 (2003): 119–125.

[24] On the relation of migraine to estrogen rising and falling, see E. A. MacGregor et al., "Incidence of Migraine Relative to Menstrual Cycle Phases of Rising and Falling Estrogen," *Neurology* 67 (2006): 2154–2158; Nu Cindy Chai, B. Lee Peterlin, and Anne H. Calhoun, "Migraine and Estrogen,"

exact causes of autoimmune issues are unknown, it is speculated that a combination of female hormones and the additional X-chromosome contribute to the higher rates in women than men.[25] Thus, women likely experience more pain than men due to the nature of their bodies.

Now, we will consider the evidence that women experience more fatigue than men due to their bodies. Women are significantly more likely to experience insomnia than men are.[26] Although social factors may play a role in this reality, it appears that the female body is at least a partial cause. The disparity in rates of insomnia between the two sexes begins at puberty, around the time of menarche, suggesting that female sex hormones might partly account for the disparity.[27] Further, times of great hormonal change are particularly associated with tiredness. Tiredness is an extremely common complaint during pregnancy.[28] Hormonal changes certainly play a role in this: Progesterone has hypnotic anesthetic properties.[29] Further, insomnia and sleep disturbances are common during both pregnancy and menopause.[30]

Current Opinion in Neurology 27 (2014): 315–324. On the lower rates of migraine in postmenopausal women, see Patrizia Ripa et al., "Migraine in Menopausal Women: A Systematic Review," *International Journal of Women's Health* 7 (2015): 773–782.

[25] Fariha Angum et al., "The Prevalence of Autoimmune Disorders in Women: A Narrative Review," *Cureus* 12 (2020): e8094; Emily Sohn, "The Importance of Sex," *Nature* 595 (2021): 51–53.

[26] J. A. Mong and D. M. Cusmano, "Sex Differences in Sleep: Impact of Biological Sex and Sex Steroids," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, Series B, Biological Sciences, 371:1688 (2016): 20150110; Mary E. Klink et al., "Risk Factors Associated with Complaints of Insomnia in a General Adult Population," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 152 (1992): 1634–1637; Bin Zhang and Yun-Kwok Wing, "Sex Differences in Insomnia: A Meta-Analysis," *Sleep* 29:1 (January 2006): 85–93, doi: 10.1093/sleep/29.1.85.

[27] Till Roenneberg et al., "A Marker for the End of Adolescence," *Current Biology* 14 (2004): R1038–R1039.

[28] Kwaghdoo Atsor Bossuah, "Fatigue in Pregnancy," *International Journal of Childbirth Education* 32 (2017): 10; Fatemeh Effati-Daryani et al., "Fatigue and Sleep Quality in Different Trimesters of Pregnancy," *Sleep Science* 14 (2021): 69–74.

[29] Etienne-Emile Baulieu and Michael Schumacher, "Progesterone as a Neuroactive Neurosteroid, with Special Reference to the Effect of Progesterone on Myelination," *Steroids* 65 (2000): 605–612; Delia Belelli and Jeremy J. Lambert, "Neurosteroids: Endogenous Regulators of the $GABA_A$ Receptor," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 6 (2005): 565–575.

[30] Cristina A. Reichner, "Insomnia and Sleep Deficiency in Pregnancy," *Obstetric Medicine* 8:4 (2015): 168–171; Martin S. Schweiger, "Sleep Disturbance in Pregnancy: A Subjective Survey," *American Journal of Obstetric Gynecology* 114:7 (1972): 879–882; S. Suzuki et al., "Sleeping Patterns during Pregnancy in Japanese Women," *Journal of Psychosomatic Obstetrics & Gynecology* 15 (1994): 19–26; Colleen Ciano et al., "Longitudinal Study of Insomnia Symptoms among Women during Perimenopause," *Journal of Obstetric, Gynecologic, and Neonatal Nursing* 46 (2017): 804–813; Joan L. Shaver and Nancy F. Woods, "Sleep and Menopause: A Narrative Review," *Menopause* 22 (2015): 899–915; Howard M. Kravitz et al., "Sleep Difficulty in Women at Midlife: A Community Survey of Sleep and the Menopausal Transition," *Menopause* 10 (2003): 19–28; Päivi Polo-Kantola, "Sleep Problems in Midlife and Beyond," *Maturitas* 68 (2011): 224–232; Nader Salari et al., "Global

Insofar as women experience more pain and fatigue than men due to the nature of their bodies, it does seem to be true that the female body presents more obstacles to the operation of their highest capacities, including reason, than the male body. To be clear, this does not entail that women are less rational because it does not entail that they exercise their rationality any less perfectly when those obstacles are not present. In other words, women are not less rational when they do exercise their reason to its fullest capacity – they simply have somewhat less control over *when* they exercise their reason to its fullest capacity. That a person experiences more frequent or longer interruptions to the use of their reason does not entail that this person is less rational – if that were the case, a person who slept more hours per night, or who took naps, would be less rational than one who slept fewer hours and did not nap. We judge people's rationality not by how often they exercise their rationality but by how *well* they exercise it. It is of course true that, in order to exercise their rationality well, people must exercise it often enough at least to gain and maintain particular habits of reason. But it does not follow from this that the more often people use their reason, the better they use it, only that there is a certain minimal threshold for how often they must use their reason in order to use it well.[31] Indeed, since human beings are embodied beings, not machines, some interruption to the use of reason – that is, sleep and rest – is unavoidable.

We can state this distinction in terms of Aristotelian metaphysics: Women on average achieve the same level of first actuality of their rational power as men; however, due to the obstacles inherent in the female body, they may obtain the highest expression of second actuality slightly less frequently. Aquinas's position, by contrast, seems to imply that women are unable to reach first actuality to the same degree as men. We can see this by a process of elimination: Aquinas holds that women are less rational than men, and this claim either means (1) they have less potentiality for reason; or (2) they cannot reach first actuality of reason (but have the same potency for reason); or (3) they cannot reach second actuality of reason (but can reach first actuality of reason). He cannot hold the first, as he is constrained by his metaphysics to hold that women share the same potency for reason

Prevalence of Sleep Disorders during Menopause: A Meta-Analysis," *Sleep and Breathing* (2023): 1–15.

[31] Interestingly, Sertillages suggests that most people can only do proper philosophical thinking a maximum of six hours per day, although he acknowledges that some brilliant individuals can handle more; further, he holds that two hours per day of concentrated effort is sufficient to maintain an academic life. See A. G. Sertillages, O.P., *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1998), 96–97.

as men as both have the same kind of soul. It is not tenable to hold the third option – that is, that women cannot obtain second actuality but can obtain first actuality – since in order to obtain first actuality, one must obtain second actuality at least some of the time as part of the learning process and, in many cases, in order to maintain the habits that constitute first actuality. Further, he cannot hold that women simply obtain secondary actuality less frequently than men do, since, as I have argued above, this is not sufficient to entail that one is less rational. Thus, the only remaining position is that women do not obtain first actuality of their reason to the same extent as men do.

While I do not have space to develop the point here, it seems that the fact that women experience more pain and fatigue than men has ramifications for equality. While women are equally rational as men, they experience more obstacles from their bodies.[32] Thus, if we want women to be able to use their capacities fully, we must design a world that accommodates the realities of the female body.

Now, I will turn to considering whether the female body might have a positive effect on the use of reason. The female body seems to aid the study of philosophy because its changing nature ensures an openness to sense experience. For Aquinas, all knowing begins in the senses. Sense knowledge culminates in experience, a collection of particulars ordered into rough categories. From experience, the universal claims that constitute science can be educed.[33] Human reasoning must be checked against first principles, and sense information constitutes one of the first principles of human knowledge.[34] Thus, all human reasoning must align with what is known through the senses. However, sense data is by nature messy and complicated, and there is always a danger in philosophy of ignoring the phenomena for the sake of theoretical simplicity. The constant change of a woman's body provides protection against trying to force reality into overly simplified categories. Women do not have the luxury of ignoring sense experience for the sake of a tidy argument as sensory experience forces itself upon them.

Further, there are certain disciplines that Aquinas acknowledges can never be sciences because they are too complex to be reduced to a finite set

[32] Not to mention social discrepancies, such as differences in the amount of unpaid household labor each sex performs, a topic that goes beyond the scope of this chapter.

[33] On experience and its relation to science, see *In I Met.* nn. 15–25; *Sententia Libri Post. Analytica* II.20 nn. 11–12, 401a–402a. See also Mark Barker, "Experience and Experimentation: The Meaning of *Experimentum* in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 76 (2012): 37–71.

[34] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 79, art. 8; *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84, art. 8.

of universal claims. In particular, the realm of human action is such. This is why deliberation is often needed to determine the appropriate course of action in a given situation.[35] By contrast, predictable sciences such as mathematics do not require any deliberation for a person who is proficient in that science.[36] If I know how to do long division, I do not need to deliberate about how to perform a long-division problem; even though there are infinite possible problems that could be set before me, all are solved by the same procedure. The realm of human action is not like this, as any change in circumstance may require a different course of action. For example, it seems to be a reasonable rule that it is polite (and therefore just) to ask other people about themselves, rather than to speak exclusively about oneself, when making conversation. However, perhaps I am visiting my uncle who has long been housebound due to illness, and therefore has little new to report, and perhaps has become tired of discussing his condition; in this case, I may discern that it is best to tell him news from my own life in order to entertain him and distract him from his suffering. However, my judgment may need to be revised again if, for example, I sense that he is eager to tell stories, perhaps stories from a time prior to his illness. We need to constantly reevaluate our choices in real time if we are to act well continually. For this reason, Aquinas holds that prudence, the virtue by which we determine how to act in a concrete situation, can only be a matter of experience, not science.[37]

Aquinas's comments about prudence and deliberation occur in his discussion of ethics. However, it seems to me that his arguments for the need for prudence and deliberation apply not only to ethics but to any discipline or activity that deals with the human heart. This includes any discipline that involves nurturing or forming another human being, such as teaching, raising children, or therapy. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that women have often been associated with these disciplines.

Further, activities dealing with the human heart differ from Aristotelian science not merely because they cannot be reduced to a finite set of rules, but because they require empathy; that is, the ability to assess human emotion and mental states and react appropriately. Empathy can be divided into cognitive and affective components: cognitive empathy, sometimes referred to as "mind reading" or "theory of mind," is the ability to assess the mental states of others correctly, while affective empathy is the tendency to feel the correct emotion in response. Cognitive empathy is

[35] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 14, art. 1. [36] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 14, art. 4.
[37] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 47, art. 3 ad 2; *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 49, art. 1.

a kind of knowledge that cannot be obtained by reasoning or rule-following as it requires constant adaptation in real time to ever-changing circumstances that cannot be exhaustively listed in advance.[38]

There is ample evidence that women are, on average, better empathizers. With regard to cognitive empathy, women are better at recognizing emotions in human faces (with the exception of anger, which men more accurately identify) as well as interpreting action, facial expression, and body language.[39] With regard to affective empathy, women have been found to have stronger reactions to stimuli involving human suffering and score higher on questionnaires designed to assess empathy.[40]

Women's capacity for cognitive and affective empathy appears to be connected with an interest in human beings in general. Women have been found to show a greater preference for stimuli involving human beings compared with stimuli lacking a human element.[41] Even in a study performed on one-day-old infants, female infants, as a whole, spent more time looking at faces than at a mobile, while male infants spent more time looking at the mobile.[42] Further, women even show a greater tendency to see faces where there are none.[43] Thus, Edith Stein's claim that women are

[38] While some philosophers have argued that reading human mental states does indeed occur in such a way, Thomists would generally not be sympathetic to such a position. Indeed, as many have pointed out, it seems to presuppose a Cartesian view of the self as disembodied and isolated from the world, and thus philosophers who reject this starting-point tend to reject this view. See Eleonore Stump, *Wandering in Darkness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), ch. 4; Daniel De Haan, "Approaching Other Animals with Caution," *New Blackfriars* 100 (2019): 720–722; William Jaworski, *Structure and the Metaphysics of Mind: How Hylomorphism Solves the Mind–Body Problem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 294–301.

[39] See the many studies cited and discussed in Alice Mado Proverbio, "Sex Differences in Social Cognition," in *Social and Affective Neuroscience of Everyday Human Interaction from Theory to Methodology*, ed. Paulo Sérgio Boggio et al. (Cham: Springer, 2023), 88–92; Simon Baron-Cohen, The Essential Difference: Male *and* Female Brains *and the* Truth *about* Autism (London: Penguin, 2012), 49–52.

[40] Alice Mado Proverbio et al., "Sex Differences in the Brain Response to Affective Scenes with or without Humans," *Neuropsychologia* 47:12 (2009): 2374–2388; Martin Schulte-Rüther et al., "Gender Differences in Brain Networks Supporting Empathy," *Neuroimage* 42:1 (2008): 393–403; Shihui Han, Yan Fan, and Lihua Mao, "Gender Difference in Empathy for Pain: An Electrophysiological Investigation," *Brain Research* 1196 (2008): 85–93; David M. Greenberg et al., "Testing the Empathizing-Systemizing Theory of Sex Differences and the Extreme Male Brain Theory of Autism in Half a Million People," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115:48 (November 27, 2018): 12152–12157; Xiao Wu et al., "Sex Difference in Trait Empathy Is Encoded in the Human Anterior Insula," *Cerebral Cortex* 33:9 (April 2023): 5055–5065.

[41] See the studies discussed in Proverbio, "Sex Differences in Social Cognition," 94–96.

[42] Jennifer Connellan et al., "Sex Differences in Human Neonatal Social Perception," *Infant Behavior and Development* 23 (2000): 113–118, cited in Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, 88–90.

[43] Marina A. Pavlova, Klaus Scheffler, and Alexander N. Sokolov, "Face-n-Food: Gender Differences in Tuning to Faces," *PLoS One* 10:7 (2015): e0130363; Alice Mado Proverbio and Jessica Galli, "Women Are Better at Seeing Faces Where There Are None: An ERP Study of Face Pareidolia,"

more interested in persons than men are finds support from the modern empirical sciences.[44]

A skeptic might object that, even if there is a large amount of well-documented evidence that women are superior in both cognitive and affective empathy, these differences might be caused primarily or exclusively by societal expectations rather than by biology. Thus, contrary to the thesis of this chapter, the female body might not be a cause of women's disposition for empathy.

While social conditioning almost certainly contributes to the way in which both men and women develop their capacities, there are at least three reasons for thinking that the female body is also a partial cause of women's disposition for empathy. First, a study in which vervets of both sexes were presented with several toys showed that females spent more time than males playing with dolls.[45] The study of those animals that are closest in relation to human beings, such as primates, is a useful means of isolating the biologically conditioned aspects of human behavior, as other species are presumably not subject to cultural conditioning.[46] Thus, the preference of female vervets for human-like toys is evidence that the same tendency in human females has its roots in biology.

Secondly, from an evolutionary perspective it seems likely that men and women would develop different yet complementary strengths. Division of roles, with females acting as caregivers and men as hunters and defenders, likely dates to the earliest *Homo sapiens* and may even have given us an advantage over other hominoids.[47] Once the roles of men and women were divided, each sex would be subject to different evolutionary pressures. Since women performed most of the care of the young, empathy was an evolutionary advantage insofar as it allowed women to interpret the needs of their children, especially before they start to speak. Furthermore, since the care of human infants is very demanding, community support is a great

Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience 11:9 (September 2016): 1501–1512, cited in Proverbio, "Sex Differences in Social Cognition," 98.

[44] Edith Stein, *Essays on Woman*, trans. Freda Mary Oben (Washington, DC: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 1996), 44–46.

[45] Gerianne M. Alexander and Melissa Hines, "Sex Differences in Response to Children's Toys in Nonhuman Primates (*Cercopithecus aethiops sabaeus*)," *Evolution and Human Behaviour* 23 (2002): 467–479; Proverbio, "Sex Differences in Social Cognition," 101–102.

[46] For many interesting reflections on the use of ethological studies for understanding something of human nature, see Mary Midgley, *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 2002), chs. 4 and 5.

[47] Steven L. Kuhn and Mary C. Stiner, "What's a Mother to Do? The Division of Labor among Neanderthals and Modern Humans in Eurasia," *Current Anthropology* 47:6 (2006): 953–980.

advantage, and presumably those women who excelled at empathy were most likely to build the community to support them in childrearing.[48]

Finally, there is evidence that pregnancy reinforces a woman's capacity for empathy in at least two ways. The first is through hormonal change, specifically the hormone oxytocin. It is well accepted that oxytocin is the primary hormonal substrate of empathy.[49] Likewise, it is also one of the most fundamental hormones in mammalian reproduction. Oxytocin increases during pregnancy and is necessary to give birth naturally, spiking during labor and in the hour immediately after birth.[50] Furthermore, it is released during breastfeeding.[51] Thus, insofar as pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding all involve the rise of oxytocin and oxytocin is likewise the primary substrate of empathy, it seems that pregnancy enhances empathy.

Secondly, pregnancy causes significant changes in brain structure, primarily a loss of gray matter in parts of the brain associated with social cognition. It is hypothesized that these changes support the development of cognitive empathy in mothers of infants.[52]

Thus, I conclude that, while the female body causes women to experience more pain and fatigue than men do, it also strengthens women's cognitive and affective empathy. Some people might find this conclusion disappointing: Is it just another way of saying that women's strengths lie in matters of the home, reinforcing the idea that women are not equal participants in those pursuits that are truly skilled and interesting, such as the arts and sciences? In response, I would note that I have already argued that women are not any less rational than men; thus a strength in

[48] Baron-Cohen, *The Essential Difference*, ch. 9.

[49] See, e.g., Sarina Rodrigues et al., "Oxytocin Receptor Genetic Variation Relates to Empathy and Stress Reactivity in Humans," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science* 106:50 (December 15, 2009): 21437–21441; Kelly Hubble et al., "Oxytocin Increases Attention to the Eyes and Selectively Enhances Self-Reported Affective Empathy for Fear," *Neuropsychologia* 106 (November 2017): 350–357; A. M. Barchi-Ferreira and F. L. Osório, "Associations between Oxytocin and Empathy in Humans: A Systematic Literature Review," *Psychoneuroendocrinology* 129 (July 2021): 105268; Yayuan Geng et al., "Oxytocin Enhancement of Emotional Empathy: Generalization across Cultures and Effects on Amygdala Activity," *Frontiers in Neuroscience* 12 (July 2018): 512; Yayuan Geng et al., "Oxytocin Facilitates Empathic- and Self-Embarrassment Ratings by Attenuating Amygdala and Anterior Insula Responses," *Frontiers in Endocrinology* 9 (September 2018): 572.

[50] Marie Prevost et al., "Oxytocin in Pregnancy and the Postpartum: Relations to Labor and Its Management," *Front Public Health* 2:1 (January 2014); Eva Nissen et al., "Elevation of Oxytocin Levels Early Postpartum in Women," *Acta Obstetricia et Gynecologica Scandinvanica* 74:7 (August 1995): 530–533.

[51] Risa Niwayama et al., "Oxytocin Mediates a Calming Effect on Postpartum Mood in Primiparous Mothers," *Breastfeeding Medicine* 12 (March 2017): 103–109.

[52] Elseline Hoekzema et al., "Pregnancy Leads to Long-Lasting Changes in Human Brain Structure," *Nature Neuroscience* 20:2 (February 2017): 287–296.

empathy does not entail a weakness in other forms of rationality. Further, although I do not have space to develop the point here, I would argue that empathy is essential not only to our humanity but also to certain high-level pursuits that have no immediate relation to the raising of children. For example, Stump has argued that knowledge of persons such as is known through empathy is a chief example of what she calls "Franciscan knowledge" – that is, knowledge that cannot be wholly encapsulated as knowledge that something is the case – and that Franciscan knowledge is essential to many philosophical pursuits. If philosophy takes its basis in experience, as it does for Aquinas, then the more complete our experience, the better we are able to philosophize. Without direct knowledge of persons, our experience is impoverished, and our philosophy is weaker for it. Knowledge of persons is an equal partner and collaborator with more abstract and systematic kinds of knowledge.[53]

4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Aquinas is a worthy interlocutor for contemporary feminists. His well-developed hylomorphism provides a fertile ground for a discussion of women's nature and flourishing, as some authors have already begun to explore. Like certain feminists, Aquinas sees the female body as an impediment to women's equality. Specifically, he holds that the female body impedes the function of reason. I have argued that Aquinas was wrong to conclude that the female body renders women less rational than men. However, the claim that the female body is a source of inequality contains a kernel of truth insofar as women experience more pain and fatigue than men due to the nature of their bodies, and pain and fatigue impede people from fully actualizing their higher capacities. The pain and fatigue of the female body do not render women less rational, but they do cause intermittent interruption to women's ability to exercise their higher capacities to the fullest degree. Further, the nature of the female body strengthens women's ability in the areas of cognitive and affective empathy, and empathy of both kinds is essential not only to our humanity but also to many academic pursuits.

It seems to me that there are many interesting ramifications of these conclusions to be developed. I have already mentioned that the nature of women's bodies has significance for equality, and the precise nature of the social, cultural, and legal conditions needed for women's equality would

[53] Stump, *Wandering in Darkness*, 58–63.

need to be fleshed out. Likewise, a theological perspective on the meaning of suffering might have something interesting to say about the suffering stemming from the female body. The role empathy plays in the various arts and sciences could be considered in order to grasp women's contributions to these disciplines. However, all these thoughts must be developed elsewhere.

CHAPTER 8

Thomistic Approaches to Life and Death Issues

Patrick Lee

Contemporary debates about life issues center on specific acts such as abortion, euthanasia, killing in war, capital punishment, and so on. The opposing positions on these issues, however, ultimately hinge on differences regarding prior questions in metaphysics, philosophy of nature, and ethical principles. So it is not surprising that Thomistic philosophy can shed much light on these issues. This chapter will not attempt to settle the details of these controversies. Rather, it will address the root differences in these debates that concern both the basis for the right to life and its extension (how broad is the class of beings that possess such a right?).

St. Thomas and Thomists[1] hold that the ground for having basic rights (including the right to life) is *being a person*. A person can be defined as: *an individual substance of a rational nature*.[2] As a type of substance, being a person is an essential attribute; so a human being does not come to be at one time and then become a person at a later time, or cease being a person before dying.

However, most of the Thomistic tradition has also held that a person can *forfeit* his or her right to life by committing a serious crime or by becoming an enemy soldier on the unjust side of a war. (I discuss why some Thomists debate this issue in Section 4.) But apart from such gravely unjust, disqualifying actions, all human persons have fundamental inherent dignity and basic rights, including the right to life.[3] Having a right to life is (at least) the default status for a human person.

[1] Hereafter I will use the term "Thomistic tradition" – unless otherwise noted – to include both St. Thomas and philosophers and theologians greatly influenced by him.

[2] This is the classic definition from Boethius. See Boethius, *De Duabus Naturis*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. Jacques Paul Migne (Paris: Migne, 1891), 1354–1412. St. Thomas provides his explanation of this definition at *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 29, art. 1 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1962).

[3] Specifically, having such a right means that one has a right not to be intentionally killed, and a right that one's well-being (including one's life) not be disregarded or unjustly damaged (as in omission or side effects of other actions).

1 The Basis of Fundamental Rights Implicit in the Principles of the Natural Law

Thomas defends this basic position by reference to sacred Scripture,[4] but it is also implicit in his understanding of the basic principles of the natural law. The question is: How do I first apprehend that (a) I am valuable or worthwhile, (b) others are worthwhile, and (c) which others – or what kind of others – are worthwhile? On the Thomistic understanding of the natural law, these points are first known not by an inference but in understanding the first principles of practical reason, which are the same as the first principles of the natural law. These principles are the expression of one's very first apprehensions of what makes alternative courses of action worth pursuing, and implicit in them is an apprehension that the person understanding these practical truths – and any individual of the kind that can do so – is worthwhile.

Whenever we deliberate about what to do, we begin by apprehending that some types of conditions or activities are worthwhile pursuing for their own sake and not merely as a means toward other conditions. For example, I cannot begin to consider whether to go to the library or to stay home and watch TV unless I first recognize that these activities might promote some good conditions worthwhile in themselves – such as knowledge or aesthetic experience. If such activities only offered to promote instrumental goods, and those still other instrumental goods, and so on, ad infinitum, I could see no point in choosing one or the other of them. On the Thomistic view, by reason I directly apprehend – though perhaps only implicitly in my deliberations – that conditions such as life and health, knowledge, aesthetic experience, friendship, and other intrinsic goods are worth pursuing. These insights are expressed in self-evident, practical propositions – such as: *Life is a good to be pursued*, *Knowledge is a good to be pursued*, and so on.[5] On Aquinas's view, I cannot begin to deliberate about what to do unless I first recognize that certain conditions are worth pursuing – for me and for others like me.

I apprehend directly such conditions as life, knowledge, harmony with other people, and so on not just as things that I would like to do but as inherently worthwhile. At the same time, I apprehend that I have a *responsibility* specified by these goods as opportunities – a responsibility to do something with my life, something worthwhile, responsive somehow

[4] Genesis 1: 29–30 and Psalm 8: 5–9.
[5] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 94, art. 2; IaIIae qu. 10, art. 1.

to opportunities such as these. Further, in understanding that there are goods worth pursuing, I apprehend that I myself am an agent and that I and my fulfillment are worthwhile.

But I also apprehend that the persons next to me – for example, the persons sitting with me at the dinner table, or the kids playing games with me outdoors – are similarly situated with respect to these same intrinsic human goods. I understand that the possibilities that I view are also possibilities that these other persons view, and I understand that the basic responsibility that I apprehend they also apprehend.[6] And so I understand that the goods worthy of pursuit include not just those that fulfill my own self but also the actual or possible fulfillments of those who are presented (or can be presented) with the same type of view, and who see (or can see) the same type of responsibility.[7]

And as I apprehend that I am a person persisting through time, and am worthwhile, I see that in just the same way the human beings next to me are also persons persisting through time and are worthwhile. As my life, health, knowledge, and so on *matter* and are worth pursuing, in the same way the life, health, knowledge and so on, of others who are similarly related to such goods are worth pursuing, and the persons themselves are worthwhile.

Thus, the responsibility specified by goods understood as worth pursuing, and that it would be good to pursue, extends to the goods – that is, the being and fulfillment – of all those who either do or can (now or in the future) understand these goods as worth pursuing. Animal urges or sheer desires do not ground or justify the choice-worthiness of their objects, but being a fulfillment that one's practical reason can apprehend as a good worth pursuing does. It grounds and enables one to understand the intrinsic good and worthwhileness of the fulfillment of other agents and of those agents themselves.

[6] John Finnis, *Human Rights and Common Good, Critical Essay: Volume III* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–11.

[7] Viewed from a different angle: I ought to promote and respect the good that is genuinely fulfilling for me; B ought to promote and respect the good that is genuinely fulfilling for her. There is no difference between B and me that is relevant with respect to what one ought to do; that is, with respect to what one has some responsibility in some way to do. The practical ought applies to the goods for me, *and to the goods that are options for choice (or could be options for choice) for others.* This is not an inference – I do not first know these other points as premises; rather, the similarity of B to me, or of D and C, etc. is directly apprehended and is part of, or at least implicit in, the first practical principles. I see then, not by an inference, but in a direct apprehension, that *I* ought to promote and respect the well-being of B, C, and D, just as I ought to promote and respect my own good. Finnis, *Human Rights and Common Good*, 1–11. On this point also see David Oderberg, *Applied Ethics: A Non-Consequentialist Approach* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 121–136. It is also similar to Alan Gewirth's position on the rights of others: Alan Gewirth, "The Justification of Morality," *Philosophical Studies* 53:245 (1988): 121–136.

We also apprehend that others are in essentially the same practical position that we are in – and so are worthwhile just as we are – when we actively cooperate with others, to pursue goods in common. When intelligently cooperating with others, I understand that some other beings are related to me as co-subjects, or as potential co-subjects. If I cooperate with others in pursuing the good of health or understanding, for example, I directly apprehend both myself and these others as subjects, as worthwhile in ourselves, and as persons for whom such goods as health, understanding, and so on are worth pursuing.[8]

When we apprehend that other persons are worthwhile, it is these concrete human persons – body–soul composites – that, just as we do, persist through time. The beings that a person should care for – and all others similarly situated toward these intelligible goods – are agents, beings who persist through time – in philosophical language, substances. And an agent ought to care about what happens to her and to beings like her not only when they are actually conscious but also during those periods of their lives when they are unable to respond to commands, to painful stimuli and the like.

2 Every Human Being Is a Person

On the Thomistic position, then, basic rights are consequent on being a person. But this raises a further question: Are all human beings persons? The Thomistic answer is: yes,[9] and therefore all human beings have a right to life (absent a serious crime that might forfeit it). Some philosophers, however, have argued that it is only persons that have a right to life, that not all human beings are persons, and therefore not all human beings have a right to life. The claim that some human beings are not persons could mean two different things. First, it could mean that human beings are physical organisms, but not persons – that, instead, they are conscious

[8] At several places Aquinas seems to set out what might seem to be a proof of this point. See, e.g., the prologue to *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae, and *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 112 (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1967). The argument would be: Rational beings are intrinsically valuable or exist for their own sake because they are masters of their own acts. It seems to me, however, that this is not a standalone proof or argument; rather, it depends on grasping the inherent value – that it is to-be -pursued – of a *subject*, which is done in the apprehension of the first principles of the natural law. In the last several paragraphs I have tried merely to explicate that aspect of those principles.

[9] Aquinas holds and defends the Catholic theological position that Jesus is a divine person, not a human person – a divine person with both a divine nature and a human nature. Still, on this belief, *that* concrete human being is a person, albeit a divine person with a human nature. We need not examine that issue here, of course, but the proposition in the text stands, without depending on that Christian belief.

subjects possessing or inhabiting physical organisms. Hence the person may come to be or cease to be at a different time than the organism it possesses or inhabits. So, while the human organism I'm associated with came to be in my mother's womb, I – the person – did not. Thus, human embryos and foetuses are humans but not persons. Similarly, if a human being suffers severe dementia, the human organism continues to live but the person once closely associated with that organism has departed or ceased to be. The person may be conceived of as a substance, as a series of experiences suitably connected, or in some other fashion, but the person is not the human being.[10]

However, the Thomistic tradition has several arguments to show that human persons are not consciousnesses that *possess or inhabit* bodies but *are* living bodily entities. One argument advanced by Aquinas appeals to our direct understanding that it is the same agent, the same I, that understands and that senses: "Each one experiences that it is he himself who understands."[11] But the agent that understands – what each of us refers to as "I" – must be a bodily entity. For, "it is one and the same human being that is conscious both that he understands, and that he senses. And one cannot sense without a body."[12] Here's the argument:

1. What performs a bodily act (i.e. an act that is performed with a bodily organ) is a bodily entity.
2. Sensing is a bodily act.
3. Therefore what performs the act of sensing is a bodily entity.
4. The entity referred to by the word "I" is the agent that understands (or is self-conscious).
5. It is the same agent that senses and that understands.
6. Therefore, the agent that understands is a bodily entity (though the act of understanding is not itself a bodily act; that is, an act performed with a bodily organ). In other words, I am a bodily entity – a bodily entity that senses, and so an animal, one that understands (and so a rational animal).

Step 2 means that, just as one walks with one's legs as the organs with which one acts, similarly, one performs the act of sensing with external sense organs and portions of one's brain. Some evidence for this point is that sensory acts have spatial properties, indicating they are performed with

[10] An example: Michael Tooley, "Abortion: Why a Liberal View Is Correct," in *Abortion, Three Perspectives*, ed. Michael Tooley et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3–65, esp. 8–11, 51–59.

[11] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 76, art. 1. [12] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 76, art. 1.

bodily organs. That is, if an activity is distributed in space – part of its work here and part there – as we see, for example, in the act of gripping a physical object with one's hand – then it is being performed with a bodily organ, itself having spatial parts. But spatial distribution pervades sensory acts. Touch involves sensing different parts of a surface with different parts of one's organ of touch; and sensory (and imaginative) presentations are divisible into spatially distinct parts – for example, one's visual image has a top and bottom, and a right and left.[13] So the act of sensing is a bodily act.

According to Aquinas, step 5 is immediately evident to each person's experience. But there is additional evidence for it in the knowledge of singular propositions. When one affirms, for example, that *That is a tree*, it is by *understanding* – an intellectual act – that one apprehends what is meant by "tree" and apprehends the object as a unitary, living thing. The predicate of the proposition is grasped by one's understanding (i.e. one's capacity to understand, one's *intellect*). The subject of the judgment, however – what one refers to by the word "That" – must be directly apprehended by sensation or perception. What one means by "That" is precisely that which is perceptually present to one.[14] But, clearly, it must be the same thing, the same agent, that apprehends the predicate and the subject of a single judgment. So, it is the same thing, the same agent, which understands and which senses or perceives. So, I (the agent that understands) am a bodily being (an agent that performs activities with bodily organs).[15] The claim that human organisms come to be at one time but you and I come to be only later – or that we cease to be while the human organism with which we are closely associated continues to be – is mistaken.[16] You and I came to be when the physical organisms that we are came to be, and do not die until these physical organisms die.

[13] Michael Augros, *The Immortal in You* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017), 100–107; Patrick Lee and Robert George, *Body–Self Dualism in Contemporary Ethics and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 10–15; Jason Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2020), chs. 3 and 4.

[14] The word "that" signifies a singular object by means of a concept, but the concept is a demonstrative, and so its reference is dependent on sensation or perception.

[15] Also Lee and George, *Body–Self Dualism*, chs. 1–2; Augros, *The Immortal in You*, ch. 5.

[16] Aquinas also argues that the structure or nature of human intellectual knowledge provides evidence that the body is part of a human being, not a possession. A human being's intellectual acts – acts that are proper or specific to human beings – naturally depend on the content provided by sensation and perception. If the brain – the central organ with which one senses and imagines – is damaged or diseased, this impedes understanding. So, even though the intellectual act itself is not an act done with a body – it is in itself a spiritual act – by its nature it requires the products of sensation and imagination, which *are* actions performed with bodily organs. This is a significant point. Just as the heart or the lungs cannot perform their characteristic acts by themselves but can perform their functions only with the cooperation of other bodily parts, and this indicates that the heart and lungs

There is a second thing someone might mean by saying that some human beings are not persons (and therefore lack a right to life). According to the previous view, some human beings are not persons because persons are entities distinct from the physical organisms they have or inhabit. But, on this second view, one claims that human beings are persons at only certain stages of their lives – when they are self-conscious or capable of self-consciousness. The first view denies that you and I were alive in our mother's wombs (or at early stages in gestation). According to the second view, even though you and I were in our mother's wombs, we were not persons at that time.[17] Similarly, we might cease to be a persons – if we suffer severe dementia – some time before dying. On this view, being a person is similar to being a musician: Just as one typically comes to be at one time but becomes a musician later, so you and I came to be at one time but became persons at a later time, and can cease to be persons at a stage considerably before our dying. Being a person is not a type of substance, but requires an additional accidental characteristic.[18]

The most plausible candidates for person-making characteristics are mental functions that seem to entail *having interests*. Thus, Judith Thomson (among others) argued that in order to have rights, an individual must have interests: for an individual has an interest in something only if it *matters to* her, and it matters *to* her only if she has a conscious desire for it (or at least a proximate capacity for such a desire).[19] Conversely, to violate someone's rights necessarily involves in some way *interfering with that person's conscious desires*. So, if a being lacks the capacity for conscious desires, then it cannot be violated, and if it cannot be violated it cannot have rights – and so is not a person.

Several objections have been raised against this position, but the most central difficulty for it is that it seems to rest on the assumption that

are only parts of a larger whole, a similar point follows with respect to the source of human understanding and willing – the human intellect and the soul in which it inheres. That is, since a human being cannot perform acts of understanding (or willing) without the cooperation of bodily components, the source of these acts (the intellectual soul) is incomplete by its nature. See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84, arts. 1, 6, and 7. Also see Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, 3rd ed. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1970), ch. 2.

[17] There are numerous proponents of this view in the context of the debate on the morality of abortion. Bonnie Steinbock, *Life before Birth: The Moral and Legal Status of Embryos and Fetuses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Kate Greasley, *Arguments about Abortion, Personhood, Morality and Law* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[18] A word used in this way is sometimes also called a "phase" sortal, since it names a substance but only during certain phases of its existence.

[19] Judith Thomson, "Abortion," 3 (1995), *Boston Review*: www.bostonreview.net/forum/judith-jarvis-thomson-abortion; David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 102–104.

conscious desires have a type of moral normativity they lack. Rights seem to rest on having desires because a benefit satisfies a desire while a harm interferes with one. However, even in cases where at first glance it seems that the presence of desires is what grounds a right, closer inspection shows otherwise. That is, it is not the desires themselves that ground rights. Rather, desires call for respect only if they are connected to other things – genuine goods – that is, to the attainment of a genuine good that is the *object* of that desire. A desire just by itself does not ground a right or impose a duty on anyone to satisfy it.

Suppose Smith suffers from pica – an eating disorder that involves having a desire to eat nonfood items such as dirt, clay, paint chips, and so on. Such a desire does not ground any duty to fulfill it; fulfilling that desire would not as such be worthwhile. Instead, Smith will most likely visit a physician and get medication in an effort to remove the desire.[20] Of course, at some point, even after deliberation, he might choose to eat some of the dust. But if he does, it will be for the sake of attaining some peace or internal harmony – attained by quelling the desire – an intelligible good (though only a distorted fragment of it, and quelling it will likely be self-defeating). The desire itself makes no normative claim on him, and the desire itself is not in any way generated by his practical grasp of, say, eating paint chips as intelligibly good – as something providing a *reason* for action rather than a sub-rational motive.

The normative significance of desires is derivative. What is genuinely worthwhile does not as such consist in the fulfillment of conscious desires. *And so* rights are not founded on desires or desire-satisfaction, Rather, the appropriateness or goodness of those desires or satisfactions are based on the goodness or worthwhileness of their objects.[21] Activities or conditions are not worthwhile because they are desired; rather, they are desirable because they are worthwhile. The foundational intelligible link claimed by the interest or conscious-desire account runs in the wrong direction – from conscious desires (or the capacity for them) to inherent worth, rather than vice versa.

This point becomes especially clear when we consider *harm.* Significant harm does not ultimately consist in the frustration of desires, even of all-things-considered desires. Rather, harm can only reasonably be viewed as a *depriving of someone of a genuine good.* And such deprivation can occur

[20] On this point, see Mark Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), ch. 2.

[21] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 5, art. 6; IaIIae qu. 31, art. 7.

without its frustrating some previous psychological desire. The deprivation of a good is a harm independently of whether it is ever recognized as such, and independently of whether anyone previously desired what he is deprived of. The freedom a slave is deprived of remains a genuine good – and his being deprived of it remains a real harm – independently of whether he was conditioned to accept his fate or not. And so what fundamentally matters to an individual is *apprehended* or *recognized*, not decided upon. And what is recognized is real or possible prior to its being apprehended, and does not depend on that recognition. Hence you and I can be *harmed* before we possess conscious desires, and quite apart from our possessing them.

Thus, whether a condition is a fulfillment or a real deprivation is intelligibly linked to whether the condition is a genuine good or a deprivation of a genuine good rather than to whether it is a frustration of desire or not. There is an affirmative, intelligible link between having basic rights and *being an individual* of a certain type. There is no such link between having basic rights and having conscious desires (or the proximate capacity for such desires). If rationality is the relevant specific type – as argued above – then, once an individual with a rational nature comes to be, then from that moment on what one does to this individual will either help or harm the very same individual who at a later time almost everyone will recognize as having basic rights. It is true for you and me that just as we can be helped or harmed *now*, so we ourselves could have been helped or harmed at any earlier times that we existed.[22]

Compare the act of depriving a human being who has a proximate capacity for a significant good with depriving a human being who has only a radical capacity for that good – she cannot presently attain it but has the inherent capacity to do so with time and perhaps some external assistance.

[22] A proponent of the desire or interest view of rights might modify the position and hold that the relevant desires need not be an individual's *actual* desires, but instead his *ideal* desires. On this view, a teenager jilted by his girlfriend who no longer desires to live still has a right to life, and a slave conditioned to desire his slavery still has a right to freedom. Of course, if it is simply desires that an individual *would* have if he were rational and well informed, then foetuses and severely demented individuals would still have basic rights. For it is true of foetuses and severely demented individuals that they *would* have such desires if they were now mentally competent and informed. David Boonin avoids this logical consequence, arguing that "ideal desires" does not refer to all of an individual's counterfactual conditions but to the set of desires that an individual still has after his actual desires have been "idealized" – that is, the counterfactual condition is applied to an individual's actual desires, not to the individual as such. (See David Boonin, *A Defense of Abortion*, 80–81.) This specification avoids some objections to a desire account of rights and well-being. However, the account still depends on the alleged connection between rights and desires (or the proximate capacity for desires) and their possible frustration, and that is the point that the Thomistic position indicates is flawed.

In both cases, one is depriving of a good someone who persists as a self-identical being through time and is gradually moving closer to attaining that good. But the prevention of a subject from attaining a significant good seems morally serious, regardless of how close in time that subject is to attaining that good.[23] Thus, the possession of basic rights is based on the substantial nature of the rational being – on being an individual with a rational nature – not on a proximate capacity for such acts. So human beings possess basic rights in virtue of what they are (i.e. the kind of being that they are), and so all human beings – no matter the stage of their development – possess (at least presumptively) basic rights, including a basic right to life.

3 The Beginning and End of Human Lives

If all persons have a fundamental right to life (at least presumptively), and all human beings are persons, including at all stages of their lives, it remains to ask: When do human lives begin, and when do they end?

It is well known that Aquinas followed Aristotle in holding a theory of delayed hominization. Aquinas held that there is not a human being – a rational animal – until day forty for males or day ninety for females, and that the embryo lacks a rational soul, and so is not a human being. Of course, Aquinas reached this conclusion by applying his philosophical principles to the then current embryological beliefs, many of which turned out to be false. So, Thomists ask two questions here: Are the principles sound? And if so, what conclusion do they imply if applied to the embryological facts as we know them today?

Both Aquinas and Aristotle knew, of course, that the male and the female together generate the human offspring. However, they were unaware of the distinct male and female sex cells, and of the complex programs embedded in the genetic and epigenetic structures within those cells (gametes). For this reason, they were unaware of the very complex organization already found within each gamete, and also of the roughly equal role (in terms of directional influence) of the female and male

[23] This point was ably defended in several articles by Don Marquis. For example: "Why Abortion Is Immoral," *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989): 183–202; "Deprivation, Futures, and the Wrongness of Killing," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 27 (2001): 363–369. Marquis couches his view in terms of what an individual would eventually desire, and he also uses the term "person" as a phase sortal. Nevertheless, he ably defends the position that an individual, at any phase of her life, is wrongly harmed when deliberately deprived of a "valuable future," thus making the existence of the individual rather than her desires be the main point about whether she can be harmed.

gametes (ovum and sperm). Aquinas held that the efficient cause of the generative process is the father, and that the mother is only the material cause. The mother contributes only relatively unformed menstrual blood; the male contributes semen, and the semen is the active principle, gradually forming the relatively unformed menstrual blood in the direction of a more organized or specified living entity.

Since the generative process occurs outside the male's body, Aristotle and Aquinas held that the father is the principal cause, and the semen an instrumental cause of the generative process. The semen has within it a force from the father, a *virtus formativa*. They reasoned that the semen, acting as an instrumental cause, organized the matter provided by the female, first to form a being with vegetative life, then a distinct being with lower sensitive life, then another being with a higher sensitive life, and so on, until an animal is produced with sufficient organization to be an individual of the same species as the parents. The active part of the semen (called "the animal spirit") remains until the generative process is completed.

Since on their view the difference in complexity between the beginning and end points of the generative process is very great, it was reasonable for them to conclude that traversing that distance required considerable time. The human soul is related to the human body as form to matter, the human soul specifying the human body to be the kind of body it is. The matter – that out of which the animal organism comes to be – must be proportionate to the form; it must be apt for receiving that specific type of form. So it must be a body capable of participating in the actions specific to the species in question – somewhat as the materials from which one makes a knife must be apt for being sharpened. And so the rational soul cannot be present until the body is sufficiently organized to be apt for reception of a rational, human soul, and that point is not attained (Aquinas believed) until the body possesses sense organs, and thus is capable of participating in acts of sensation, as prerequisites for rational consciousness.[24]

However, modern embryology shows many of the factual beliefs that this argument is based on are false. Modern embryologists discovered that the female provides a gamete (the ovum), which is already a highly

[24] On this point, see John Haldane and Patrick Lee, "Aquinas on Human Ensoulment, Abortion and the Value of Life," *Philosophy* 78 (2003): 255–278. Two authors who argued that Aquinas's theory of delayed hominization is still sound are: William Wallace, "St. Thomas on the Beginning and End of Human Life," in *Sanctus Thomas de Aquino, Doctor Hodiernae Humanitatis*, ed. D. Ols (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 394–407; and Fabrizio Amerini, *Aquinas on the Beginning and End of Human Life*, trans. Mark Henninger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

organized living cell, containing highly complex, specific information in the genetic structure of its nuclear chromosomes. This information (together with that provided by the genetic structure in the chromosomes of the male sperm) guides the development of the new living organism formed by the fusion of the sperm and the ovum. Hence the ovum and sperm are actually very close to readiness for rapid embryological development; they only require union with each other and the activation that occurs with that union to begin development along a new trajectory in accord with the instructions already contained within it, a trajectory that regularly ends in the mature stage of a human organism. To a certain extent the gradual transition from the simple to the complex that Aquinas expected actually occurs during gametogenesis (of which, of course, he was unaware).

Aquinas knew that there is a regular and predictable unity in the process of gestation – though its complexity is much more appreciated today. This regular unity cannot occur by chance but requires an explanation. Aquinas's explanation was that the semen persists as an extrinsic cause – an instrument of the father – gradually forming the successive embryonic bodies. But it is now known that nothing of the semen – and *a fortiori* no "vital spirit" – remains attached to the developing embryo. Nor does the maternal organism internally direct the embryo's development but provides only a suitable environment and gestation. While constituents from the sperm and the ovum (chromosomes and cytoplasm) enter into the make-up of the new organism, they become its parts or organs; they are not distinct agents. So if one tries to retain Aquinas's theory of delayed hominization, and holds that the embryo is only gradually formed to the point that it becomes apt for the emergence of a sensitive soul and then (the infusion) of a rational soul, one is faced with a complex, organized process that occurs with regularity, but with no apparent cause.

If there is no extrinsic agent responsible for the regular, complex development, then the obvious conclusion is that the cause of the process is within, that it is the embryo itself. Thus, the process is not an extrinsic formation but an instance of growth or maturation; that is, the active self-development of a whole, though immature organism that is already a member of the human species, the mature stage of which it is developing toward.

It is true that the sensory organs prerequisite to many specifically human actions performed by a mature human are not actually present in the developing embryo from the conception (fertilization) stage onward. However, it is now known that from fertilization on the embryo has the internal potential to develop for herself all of the organs needed for the

actions specific to a mature human being. And so the embryonic body seems to satisfy the requirement that the body be proportioned to the soul: It has the internal, specific instructions and active disposition for developing human sense organs, including a brain apt to be the substrate for conceptual thought. So, if one applies Aquinas's philosophical principles to the contemporary embryological facts, the conclusion is that at fertilization – the joining of the sperm and the ovum – a new human organism comes to be.

The position that a human being is a body–soul composite also of course has important implications for discussions about how to determine when a human person dies. This position excludes holding that a human person might die or depart prior to the death of the human organism – as is claimed by most proponents of the higher brain-death criterion. The Thomistic position on the nature of the human person supports an organic definition of death; that is, the irreversible cessation of functioning of the (human) organism as a whole. There remains, however, the question of the *criterion* (or criteria) of death – that is, how to tell when the irreversible cessation of the functioning of the organism as a whole has occurred. On this point there does not seem to be a consensus in the Thomistic tradition. Some Thomistic bioethicists have defended the brain-death criterion. Others have criticized that and proposed the cardiopulmonary criterion. The debate is complex and continues. It centers on how to understand potentiality, identity, and substantial unity.[25]

4 Can Human Beings Lose Their Right to Life? Capital Punishment

Aquinas held that in some cases the death penalty for serious criminals is morally permissible; that a soldier may morally intend the death of an enemy soldier in a just war. Some Thomists, however, have argued that these positions are inconsistent with his basic theory of moral principles. Germain Grisez argued that when followed out consistently, Aquinas's principles lead to the conclusions that all intentional killing of human beings is wrong, that capital punishment is wrong, and that killing in war is justified only when the deaths even of enemy soldiers are indirect.[26] I will discuss here the capital punishment issue.

[25] For a careful and insightful overview of the literature on this subject, see Jason Eberl, *The Nature of Human Persons*, ch. 6.

[26] Germain Grisez, "Toward a Consistent Natural-Law Ethic of Killing," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 15 (1970): 64–96.

To justify some instances of capital punishment, Aquinas argues that a part is naturally subordinated to the whole – which is why it is morally licit to amputate a gangrenous (*putridum*) leg for the sake of the whole body. But a citizen is a part of the whole community. And so, analogously: "If a man be dangerous and infectious to the community, on account of some sin, it is praiseworthy and advantageous that he be killed in order to safeguard the common good."[27]

This argument seems flawed. Although persons are in some sense parts of the state, they are not *mere* parts, but are also good or worthwhile in themselves. It is licit to amputate a gangrenous leg because the leg's goodness consists entirely in its contribution to the larger whole of which it is a part. When it becomes corruptive of the whole rather than contributory to it, it loses its worth. But the same cannot be said of a person: As a distinct substance, it has inherent worth.

Aquinas is aware of this problem, as he indicates in the third objection he poses for himself in this article. The objection is: It is never morally right to do that which is intrinsically evil (*secundam se malum*); but to kill a human being is intrinsically evil; therefore, and so on. In his reply, Aquinas does *not* deny the first premise – in fact, he reiterates it. Instead, he distinguishes the second: Although to kill that which has human dignity *is* intrinsically evil, a criminal has lost (or fallen away from) his dignity:

> By sinning, man departs from the order of reason, and consequently falls away from human dignity, according to which he is naturally free, and existing for himself, and he falls into the servitude of the beasts, so that of himself he is ordained according as he is useful to others ... Hence although to kill a human being remaining in his dignity is in itself evil (*secundum se malum*), to kill a human being who has sinned may be good, even as it is to kill a beast, for an evil human being is worse than a beast, and more harmful.[28]

This reply is instructive. If it is intrinsically wrong to kill a human being who remains in his or her dignity, then to say that capital punishment is morally permissible, one must say *either* that the criminal has lost the inherent dignity of a person – which is Aquinas's tack here – *or* that somehow it is morally licit intentionally to kill someone who has the dignity of a person.

But how could the criminal lose his personal dignity? We rightly insist on sending a criminal a priest or minister if the criminal ask, and it would

[27] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 64, art. 2.

[28] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 64, art. 2; also see *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 146. Note that the authority of the state is still needed for this, perhaps to make the judgment that he has indeed fallen to the level of a beast.

be wrong to, say, torture the criminal or experiment on him as if he were a mere sub-personal object. But if he lacked personal dignity, it is hard to see how any of that would make sense.

And yet, the idea that it can be morally right intentionally to kill a being with personal dignity is unappealing also. The basic moral norm is the intrinsic goods of human persons, or expressed otherwise, that one ought to choose in line with love of God, neighbor, and self. But life is an intrinsic good, and to love a person is to will the genuine good of that person, and so a choice to kill is a choice contrary to the well-being of the person killed.

Various ways of salvaging Aquinas's position have been proposed. One argument is that when Aquinas said that the criminal has fallen away from human dignity, he is correct, but he is not referring to the dignity that belongs to a human person in virtue of his human nature, but instead to the higher dignity possessed by a person in virtue of being ordered by reason, or by being ordered to the common good.[29]

However, while it is true that there are different types of dignity (e.g. dignity based on class, dignity based on various merits, etc.), for Aquinas's argument to succeed, the dignity that is lost must be that dignity whereby an individual is naturally free and existing for himself (as the text itself indicates). As Aquinas earlier indicated in his discussion of the objects of charity, a brute animal lacks that dignity because it is not a master of its own acts, while a sinful human being still has this nature, and therefore – the argument in this article on charity continues – we should love this concrete nature and hate only the fault or sin. However, criminals have not lost their nature, and it is by their nature that they are masters of their own acts (or at least able to be that), and so, it seems, they still have that which makes them naturally free and existing for themselves.[30]

Another attempt to salvage Aquinas's argument is to argue that, since the common good is prior to the private good, the state's responsibility for the common good gives it authority to kill the criminal. Although human life is an intrinsic good, the natural subordination of the private good to the common good means that not all intentional actions contrary to intrinsic goods are wrong, but only those that are unjust.[31]

[29] For example, Lawrence Dewan, O.P., "Thomas Aquinas, Gerard Bradley, and the Death Penalty: Some Observations," *Gregorianum* 82 (2001): 149–165.

[30] Moreover, Aquinas argues that by sinning, the criminal falls to the level of a beast. But how could he both have a dignity consequent on having a human nature and at the same time be worse than a beast? What effect does the natural dignity – distinct from the higher dignity making a human being an end in himself – actually have?

[31] Dewan, "Thomas Aquinas, Gerard Bradley, and the Death Penalty," 157.

But this argument seems incompatible with the position that personal dignity is grounded in the concrete human nature. According to this attempt to salvage the argument, the dignity of a person (or the dignity rendering him an end in himself) seems grounded instead on a relation to the political-moral common good. Grounding personal dignity in the concrete human nature is intelligible – as argued above – for it coherently recognizes intrinsic worth and well-being in the subject himself or herself. However, grounding personal dignity on a positive relation to the common good seems to deny the *intrinsic* worth of the individual person.[32]

The debate among Thomists on capital punishment continues. It centers on the nature of personal dignity, punishment, the common good, and the relation between natural law principles and political authority.[33]

The Thomistic tradition on life issues steers students into the most fundamental issues in ethics and metaphysics, including the broad-ranging questions about meaning and providence, as well as detailed questions such as the nature of direct intention and its importance, and the application of moral norms to areas not settled by what is directly intended. The core positions of the Thomistic tradition on the basis and extension of the right to life form a coherent whole: the right to life is the right not to be intentionally killed, and one's life not be unfairly neglected; being a person – an individual substance of a rational nature – is the basis of having rights; every human being is a person, including throughout her entire life. The Thomistic metaphysics and worldview provide insightful and true bases from which to defend objections and prudentially examine detailed moral issues on human life.

[32] The political common good, it can be argued, is prior to the common good only in a limited sense. It is prior or superior to the private good only in the sense that *when one is acting precisely as a citizen* one should prefer that common good to one's particular share in it – a point that is analogously true of any community. That is, when acting as a member of a community, fairness requires subordinating one's share in that common good – not one's whole self – to that common good. It is true that for the sake of one's country one might be morally required to sacrifice even one's life – but "sacrifice" means fulfilling one's responsibility to the point of suffering loss *as a side effect*; it does not mean acting directly against one's own, or another's intrinsic good as a means toward the good of the whole.

[33] For an overview of many of the arguments: E. Christian Brugger, *Capital Punishment and Roman Catholic Moral Tradition*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), chs. 5, 7, and 8. Very informative debates on the issue occurred in the online journal *Publlicdiscourse.com* – between Christopher Tollefsen and Edward Feser in 2011, and then between John Finnis and Edward Feser in 2018. The thread of those articles can be traced beginning with John Finnis's "Intentional Killing Is a Usurpation of God's Lordship Over Human Life," which appeared on December 18, 2018, here: www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2018/12/47548.

CHAPTER 9

Aquinas on Living the Virtuous Life

Heidi Giebel

Thomas Aquinas has earned his place in academic philosophy, ably employing methods like clear logical analysis and subtle distinctions. He has also earned his place as a virtue ethicist in the Aristotelian tradition, discussing the mean of virtue, the process of habituation, and many individual virtues with considerable depth and nuance. In addition to being a philosopher and a virtue ethicist, Aquinas was a Christian theologian; he argued that by grace – the free gift whereby God shares divine life with us – God infuses into the Christian's soul elevated versions of the moral virtues, along with an additional set of virtues wholly unavailable to those relying solely on natural means of character development. This unique combination of philosophical and theological foundations for Thomistic virtue ethics has interesting implications regarding Aquinas's answers to several important theoretical and practical questions. For example:

1. "Why be virtuous?" To attain *eudaimonia* as described by Aristotle? To go to heaven? Is the virtuous life ultimately egoistic?
2. "What is virtue?" A trait? A habit? A gift? How do agents' virtues relate to their reason? To their desires and emotions?
3. "What are the central virtues?" Do they include the cardinal virtues of classical Western philosophy? What about qualities typically favored by Christians but *not* by philosophers like Aristotle (e.g. humility, gratitude, faith)?
4. "How can I become virtuous?" How does habituation work? (How) is it possible, and what does it mean, to have a virtue *without* gradually habituating oneself in its characteristic actions?

While a full discussion of any one of these theoretical issues would take us well beyond the scope of this short chapter, here we can give some attention to Aquinas's own answers, particularly with regard to how those answers shape his overall picture of the life of virtue. I'll use an Aristotelian,

four-causes approach to the organization of this chapter: Section 1 mainly addresses the final cause or end of virtue; Section 2 considers its quasi-material causes (reason and appetites); Section 3 focuses on the formal causes of virtue in general and of several particular virtues, as well as the relationships between various virtues in the larger structure of Thomistic virtue ethics; and Section 4 discusses proposed efficient causes of such virtues – that is, processes for bringing them about. Along the way, we'll also consider connections between Aquinas's account and contemporary work in ethics, psychology, and education.

1 The *Telos* of the Virtuous Agent

To understand Aquinas's account of the virtuous life, we first need to understand what virtue is for – the good at which it aims. Here it will be helpful to note how his conception of virtue builds upon, and differs from, that of Aristotle. (I'll assume the reader is familiar with the basics of Aristotelian virtue ethics.)

Regarding the final cause or aim of virtue, then, Aquinas's account is as someone familiar with both Aristotle's ethics and the basic tenets of Christianity might expect: although *perfect* happiness (fulfillment of every desire and freedom from every evil) cannot be attained in this life, we can have a good earthly life of roughly the sort Aristotle had in mind – Aquinas calls it "a certain participation in Happiness."[1] But our ultimate aim is at the higher *telos* of eternal life with God. And yes, a virtuous life will help us achieve both.

1.1 *Natural Virtue and Natural Happiness*

Since the advent of the positive psychology movement a few decades ago, it has become almost commonplace to observe that people with virtues (and character strengths related to virtue[2]) tend to report more "happiness" in the usual, psychological senses of positive emotionality, subjective assessment of well-being, and overall life satisfaction. To take just a few representative examples, gratitude has been closely linked with both life

[1] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae q. 5, art. 3.

[2] For a remarkably thorough psychological account of character strengths, see Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2004). Their twenty-four-strength classification includes moral virtues such as bravery and gratitude along with other positive (but not necessarily morally virtuous) qualities such as creativity.

satisfaction and physical health.[3] Honesty and fairness are excellent predictors of successful personal and professional relationships.[4] Integrity – that is, a justice-based rather than expediency-based approach to life and decision-making – is associated with numerous benefits including a more positive outlook toward life, more satisfaction with one's roles and identity, and a more positive orientation toward others.[5] And character strengths more generally have consistently been found to be linked to a sense of well-being.[6]

Such findings are not especially surprising; astute observers of human nature have been making similar claims for centuries. To take just one particularly explicit literary example, consider the dialogue following Jane's engagement to Mr. Bingley in *Pride and Prejudice*:

> "I am certainly the most fortunate creature that ever existed!" cried Jane. "Oh, Lizzy, why am I thus singled from my family, and blessed above them all? If I could but see you as happy! If there were but such another man for you!"
>
> "If you were to give me forty such men I never could be so happy as you. Till I have your disposition, your goodness, I never can have your happiness."[7]

[3] Michael E. McCullough, Robert A. Emmons, and Jo-Ann Tsang, "The Grateful Disposition: A Conceptual and Empirical Topography," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 82 (2002): 112–127; Jeffrey J. Froh, William J. Sefick, and Robert A. Emmons, "Counting Blessings in Early Adolescents: An Experimental Study of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being," *Journal of School Psychology* 46 (2008): 213–233; Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough, "Counting Blessings versus Burdens: An Experimental Investigation of Gratitude and Subjective Well-Being in Daily Life," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84 (2003): 377–389.

[4] Alejandro Castro Solano and Alejandro Cosentino, "The Relationships between Character Strengths and Life Fulfillment in the View of Lay-People in Argentina," *Interdisciplinaria Revista de Psicología y Ciencias Afines* 33:1 (2016): 65–80; John J. Sosik, William A. Gentry, and Jae Uk Chun, "The Value of Virtue in the Upper Echelons: A Multisource Examination of Executive Character Strengths and Performance," *Leadership Quarterly* 23 (2012): 367–382. (Wisdom, bravery, and social intelligence were also found to be linked to performance among executives.)

[5] Barry R. Schlenker, "Integrity and Character: Implications of Principled and Expedient Ethical Ideologies," *Journal of Clinical and Social Psychology* 27 (2008): 1078–1125, esp. 1116–1117. For further discussion, see Heidi M. Giebel, *Ethical Excellence: Philosophers, Psychologists, and Real-Life Exemplars Show Us How to Achieve It* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2021), ch. 13.

[6] Satoshi Shimai, Keiko Otake, Nansook Park, Christopher Peterson, and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Convergence of Character Strengths in American and Japanese Young Adults," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 7 (2006): 311–322; Christopher Peterson, Willibald Ruch, Ursula Beerman, Nansook Park, and Martin E. P. Seligman, "Strengths of Character, Orientations to Happiness, and Life Satisfaction," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 2 (2007): 149–156; D. Korotkov and A. Godbout, "Personality, Motivation, Nature, and Well-Being," *Personality and Individual Differences* 60 (2014): S65.

[7] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Chiswick Press, 1894), 430. Available at Project Gutenberg, www.gutenberg.org, eBook #1342.

And, of course, the link between virtue and happiness – that is, between being an excellent human and having an excellent human life – is a central tenet of Aristotelian virtue ethics. Similarly, Aquinas argues that happiness is closely linked to character: "Imperfect happiness that can be had in this life, can be acquired by man by his natural powers, in the same way as virtue, in whose operation it consists."[8] And it can be lost by failure to retain and act on virtue.[9]

Perfect happiness, by contrast, cannot be attained through even the most heroic acts or habits of virtue: given its heavenly nature, it can only be attained via a divine gift – that is, by grace. That grace is accompanied by a different type of virtue, to which we will turn next.

1.2 Infused Virtue and Perfect Happiness

Beyond our highest natural good – the happiness attained via the perfection and exercise of our natural powers and the enjoyment of this-worldly goods – Aquinas posits a higher, supernatural end wholly unattainable by us in the natural order of things.[10] That end is nothing and no one less than God Himself: "man's last end is something outside of him, to wit, God, to Whom we reach out by an operation of the speculative intellect";[11] "for perfect happiness the intellect needs to reach the very Essence of the First Cause. And thus it will have its perfection through union with God as with that object, in which alone man's happiness consists."[12]

Just as our ultimate end is beyond the reach of our natural powers, the virtues that direct us toward that end are beyond our natural processes of habituation; they must be given – infused directly by God. But as Knobel points out, the important distinction between the sets of "acquired" and "infused" virtues in Aquinas's account is not, as their common labels suggest, their efficient cause but their final cause: "whether they are ordered to the fulfillment of our created human nature or to the fulfillment of human nature that has been perfected by the gift of God's saving grace."[13]

[8] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 5, art. 5. [9] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 5, art. 4.

[10] The natural human good and its relation to our supernatural end have been matters of perennial debate among Thomists. For two analyses, see Lawrence Feingold, *The Natural Desire to See God According to St. Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters*, 2nd ed. (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2010); and Thomas Joseph White, "Imperfect Happiness and the Final End of Man: Thomas Aquinas and the Paradigm of Nature-Grace Orthodoxy," *The Thomist* 78:2 (2014): 247–289.

[11] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 5, art. 5 ad 3. [12] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 5, art. 8.

[13] Angela McKay Knobel, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021), 2; see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 63, art. 4. Cf. Ezra Sullivan, OP, *Habits and Holiness: Ethics, Theology, and Biopsychology* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2021), 14–15;

The infused virtues direct us toward our higher, supernatural end: that is, they prepare us for union with God.

While the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 62; see 1 Corinthians 13:13) are paradigmatic cases of infused virtue and lack obvious parallels in Aristotelian virtue ethics, Aquinas argues that we are also in need of infused versions of the moral virtues.[14] Such virtues enable Christians to act well not merely with regard to human affairs but "in respect of their being fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God"[15] and perfect us "in operations ordered to the end of eternal life."[16] In aiming at that higher end, the infused moral versions differ significantly from the acquired virtues of the same names – as Aquinas puts it (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 63, art. 4), they belong to different species.[17]

1.3 Ethics, Happiness, and Egoism

As we have seen, although it is more nuanced than its counterpart in Aristotelian ethics, Aquinas's account of the human *telos* is fairly straightforward: We have both a natural good and a higher supernatural end, with a set of virtues directed toward each. More interesting and complex is Aquinas's answer – or non-answer – to the question of whether, in directing us to our *telos*, the virtuous life is ultimately egoistic. To be fair, posing this question to Aquinas's texts is somewhat anachronistic: the egoism-versus-altruism debates in philosophy and psychology began centuries after his time.[18] All the same, though, whether the virtuous life aims to benefit the self or others (or both or neither) seems a useful

Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Beatitude: A Commentary on St. Thomas' Theological Summa Ia IIa, qq. 1–54*, trans. Patrick Cummins (St. Louis, MO: Herder, 1956), 375–377.

[14] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 63, art. 3; cf. Aquinas's *Disputed Questions on the Virtues in General*, art. 10.

[15] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 63, art. 4; see Ephesians 2:19.

[16] *Disputed Questions on the Virtues in General*, art. 10.

[17] The relationship between the acquired and infused moral virtues is not clearly articulated in Aquinas's texts; Knobel addresses the two most common interpretations, "coexistence" and "unification," in chapters 4 and 5 of *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues*; in chapter 6, she argues for another: "that (1) the transformation brought about by the theological virtues is incomplete, that (2) the actions made possible by the theological and infused virtues differ in essential ways from the acts ordered to our natural fulfillment, and that (3) it is entirely plausible to think that previously cultivated habits (virtuous or otherwise) persist as dispositions after the gift of grace" (150).

[18] The literature on this topic is vast; for representative examples in the social sciences, see C. Daniel Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Elliott Sober and David Sloan Wilson, *Unto Others: The Evolution and Psychology of Unselfish Behavior* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

inquiry. We can be confident that Aquinas was not a normative egoist in any obvious sense of the term: He recognized a broad range of moral and religious duties toward God and fellow humans that were not of straightforward benefit to the self. Was he a psychological egoist – someone holding that our motivations are always fundamentally based in our (perceived) self-interest? Again, I think it is clear that he was not: he argued repeatedly that we should be motivated by love of God and neighbor in addition to our own well-being.

There is, however, a sense in which one might attempt to label Aquinas an egoist – he describes our ultimate end as that which satisfies our will: "Since good is the object of the will, the perfect good of a man is that which entirely satisfies his will. Consequently to desire happiness is nothing else than to desire that one's will be satisfied."[19] But attribution of egoism based on this and similar passages only makes sense if we equate satisfaction of the will with benefit to the self. And such an equation is decidedly un-Thomistic: the nature of the will (i.e. intellectual appetite), as described by Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 82), is to seek the good as presented by reason – whether that good is understood objectively or as good *for* the self or others.

Further, the subjective satisfaction of the will is secondary in Thomistic ethics to the objective good that satisfies it. God is the highest objective good (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 6), and contemplating God's essence – attaining and imitating that good in the most complete way possible for beings like us – is *our* highest good; thus, therein lies the satisfaction and repose of our will. This focus on the goodness of the will's object, and on our conformity to (imitation of) that good, seems to render Aquinas's teleological view perfectionistic rather than egoistic – that is, the virtuous life aims at our perfection rather than at our welfare or enjoyment. Fortunately, though, both virtue and the end at which it aims *are* beneficial and enjoyable (see, e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 4, art. 1–2).

Thus, it seems clear that in aiming at our natural good or even our supernatural end, the virtuous life as described by Aquinas is not ultimately egoistic. Having discussed the goal of the virtuous life, we will turn next to questions of the nature of virtue: in particular, the relationship between reason and the appetites in the virtuous life.

[19] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 5, art. 8. For helpful analysis, see Christopher Toner, "Was Aquinas an Egoist?" *The Thomist* 71 (2007): 577–608.

2 Reason and Appetites in the Life of Virtue

Just as Aquinas's account of virtue's end bears some resemblance to Aristotle's while also featuring significant differences stemming from Aquinas's Christian theological views, his account of the nature of virtue draws from and extends those of his philosophical predecessors while incorporating elements more in line with his thirteenth-century philosophical and theological context. In particular, we see in Aquinas a much more detailed and nuanced account of the appetites than appears in Aristotle's ethical writings, including a central role for the intellectual appetite – that is, the will.

Like classical Socratic philosophers including Aristotle and Plato, Aquinas sees virtue as a state of character – a habit[20] – in which well-functioning reason directs the appetites, leading reliably not only to good actions but also to appropriate emotions and desires.[21] On Aquinas's account of the human soul, appetites are powers (capacities) enabling us to be inclined toward suitable objects not through natural instinct (as with non-rational animals) but through our understanding of those objects (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 80, art. 1). We have two primary appetitive powers: the lower sensitive (sensation-related) appetite and the higher intellectual appetite or will (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 80, art. 2), with the sensitive appetite being further divided into the concupiscible and irascible powers – the concupiscible appetite's role is "to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful," while the irascible appetite "resists . . . attacks that hinder what is suitable and inflict harm."[22] Both concupiscible and irascible appetite are subject to

[20] Aquinas, following Aristotle, defines a *habitus* as a "disposition whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill, and this, either in regard to itself or in regard to another" (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 49, art. 1); though typically transliterated "habit" in English (a custom I follow here), *habitus* does not necessarily require habituation by repeated actions; in addition to infused virtues, there are innate physical and mental dispositions. For more on *habitus*, see Sullivan's introduction to *Habits and Holiness*. For helpful comparison and contrast with psychological approaches to habit, see Brandon Dahm and Matthew Breuninger, "Virtue and the Psychology of Habit," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 96:2 (2021): 291–315.

[21] Dahm compares Thomistic virtue to expertise; see Brandon Dahm, "A Thomistic Account of Virtue as Expertise," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36:2 (2023): 254–273, https://doi.org/10.1177/09539468221148996. Psychologist Darcia Narvaez suggests something similar in "Human Flourishing and Moral Development: Cognitive and Neurobiological Perspectives of Virtue Development," in *Handbook of Moral and Character Development*, ed. Larry Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 310–327. Narvaez's work does not fully capture the Thomistic account of virtue, however; see Juliette L. Ratchford, Timothy Pawl, Anne Jeffrey, and Sarah A. Schnitker, "What Is Virtue? Using Philosophy to Refine Psychological Definition and Operationalization," *Philosophical Psychology* (2023), doi: 10.1080/09515089.2023.2203157.

[22] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 81, art. 2.

reason for direction and to the will for execution (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 81, art. 3). When our psyche is operating as it should, then, we are reasoning well about the world, our ends, and the most appropriate ways to achieve them; as with Aristotle's moral virtues, those ways will aim at a mean between excess and deficiency (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 64, art. 1–2). And our appetites – both intellectual and sensitive – follow the guidance of our reason, thus inclining us toward, and facilitating proper execution of, internal responses and external actions suitable for our ends.

Thus the life of virtue differs markedly from the life of continence as described by Aristotle in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII, or willpower as described by contemporary psychologists, in which the well-reasoning agent suppresses her unruly appetites and forces herself to do the right thing. To illustrate the difference, consider psychologist Jonathan Haidt's description of the human psyche as a rider (reason) attempting to control an elephant (appetite).[23] With a death grip on the reins, the rider can forcibly steer the elephant – for a while. But eventually the rider's strength and energy will be no match for the elephant's: rationality and willpower fail in the face of the stronger force of desire.[24] Further, as willpower experts like Roy Baumeister and Kelly McGonigal point out,[25] the strength of our willpower is itself variable and fragile; it is easily compromised by such things as low blood sugar and lack of sleep, and it is easily worn out by tasks like making trivial decisions.

While the life of willpower can be exhausting and frustrating, the life of Thomistic virtue is experienced as liberating and joyful: The agent chooses and does exactly what she wants to do, which is also what is morally virtuous. Here, rather than distract itself with aimless or self-defeating pursuits, the metaphorical elephant is motivated by the good that reason presents.[26] Confucius describes a similar experience upon attaining virtue: "I could follow my heart's desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety."[27] Interestingly, Baumeister describes a similar

[23] Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[24] Compare Plato's metaphor of the psyche as comprising a man, a larger lion, and a *much* larger many-headed beast in *Republic* 588c–590b. I discuss the parallel in some depth in *Ethical Excellence*, ch. 8.

[25] Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin, 2011); Kelly McGonigal, *The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why It Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It* (New York: Penguin, 2012).

[26] For application of Haidt's elephant and rider metaphor to concrete behavior change, see Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010).

[27] Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003), 2.4. Getting to this state was a lifelong journey – Confucius began to focus on his character development at age fifteen and achieved this level of virtue at age seventy.

phenomenon – one that he and fellow psychologists found puzzling – in his studies of willpower: Those who "had the most willpower" seemed to "use it" (i.e. deplete it or use it up) least; they acted in self-disciplined ways without exerting excessive effort or becoming frustrated or fatigued.[28] For someone familiar with virtue theory, such a finding is not mysterious at all: The ease with which a temperate person avoids excess is entirely to be expected.

In our consideration of the role of reason and appetite in the virtuous life, and its contrast with the life of continence or willpower, we have limited ourselves thus far to a this-worldly description applicable to the natural or acquired versions of the moral virtues: those developed through habituation in the classic Aristotelian fashion. As with the end of virtue, however, we must keep in mind that the acquired virtues are not the only or even the most paradigmatic set of Thomistic virtues. And although, as Kaczor points out, a Christian life characterized by supernatural moral virtue often yields psychological benefits similar to those of the natural virtues,[29] its cause is divine infusion and its aim is eternal life – these distinctions can bring a shift in the mean of virtue, resulting in notable differences in the virtuous person's behavior. To take one of Aquinas's own examples, regarding acquired versus infused temperance: "in the consumption of food, the mean fixed by human reason, is that food should not harm the health of the body, nor hinder the use of reason: whereas, according to the Divine rule, it behooves man to 'chastise his body, and bring it into subjection' (1 Corinthians 9:27), by abstinence in food, drink and the like."[30] Determining (or discovering) the mean of infused moral virtue is itself a relational, divinely assisted activity requiring docility toward, and cooperation with, the Holy Spirit.[31] Further, each infused moral virtue is informed by a theological virtue: charity – that is, friendship with God (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 23, art. 8). The dependence of the virtues on charity yields a non-Aristotelian argument for the unity of the virtues, which we will discuss in Section 3.

[28] Baumeister and Tierney, *Willpower*, 157–158; see Denise T. D. de Ridder, Gerty Lensvelt-Mulders, Catrin Finkenauer, F. Marijn Stok, and Roy F. Baumeister, "Taking Stock of Self-Control: A Meta-Analysis of How Trait Self-Control Relates to a Wide Range of Behaviors," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 16 (2012): 76–99.

[29] See Christopher Kaczor, *The Gospel of Happiness: How Secular Psychology Points to the Wisdom of Christian Practice*, 2nd ed. (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2019).

[30] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 63, art. 4.

[31] See Eleonore Stump, "Aquinas's Ethics: The Infused Virtues and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," *New Blackfriars* (2023), https://doi.org/10.1111/nbfr.12850; cf. Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

3 Central Virtues and Their Relationships

Having considered the end and the "matter" of Thomistic virtue, we will turn next to the virtues themselves. In this section we will consider Aquinas's big-picture account of the virtuous life, including the cardinal and theological virtues and their relationships to other, in some ways lesser, moral virtues. The grand structure of the Thomistic account highlights connections among the virtues; considering these connections may yield promising avenues for character development and moral education.

The connectedness of virtues suggests the possibility of a unity of virtue, and we will consider that topic in this section as well. Aquinas proposes a nuanced account of the unity of virtue that many may find more plausible than less subtle versions of that Aristotelian thesis.

3.1 Cardinal and Theological Virtues

The big-picture structure of Aquinas's ethical theory is most easily visible in the table of contents of the Prima Secundae Partis (Part IaIIae) of the *Summa Theologiae*. There we see his treatise on our last end or *telos*, as we discussed in Section 1, followed by his treatise on human acts – where Aquinas discusses such topics as intention, deliberation, and what makes an action morally good or bad. After that is the treatise on passions, including love and hatred (in the concupiscible appetite) and fear and anger (in the irascible). Following those three treatises, we finally see Aquinas's treatises on virtue (or habit) and on vice and sin. His treatise on law and a shorter treatise on grace complete this part.

From this big-picture structure, we see that Aquinas gives virtue a central – but not exclusive – role in his ethical theory. The virtues are directed toward our final end; they incorporate good intention, deliberation, and action; they involve appropriate desires and emotions; and they work in harmony with moral and religious (and, ideally, civil) law.

Just as Aquinas's integration of virtue with other elements of the ethical life can be seen in the overall structure of Part IaIIae of the *Summa Theologiae*, his integration of Christian and classical accounts of virtue can be seen even from a cursory glance at the table of contents of Part IIaIIae. There, the main divisions follow the Christian theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity) and the classical Western cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance). The theological virtues are clearly derived from the biblical text extolling these qualities: "faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians

13:13, NAB). They are needed, as we noted earlier, to direct us to our supernatural *telos*. More specifically, because that *telos* is above anything the intellect can naturally understand and the will can naturally pursue, both faculties are in need of divine assistance:

> First, as regards the intellect, man receives certain supernatural principles, which are held by means of a Divine light: these are the articles of faith, about which is faith. Secondly, the will is directed to this end, both as to that end as something attainable – and this pertains to hope – and as to a certain spiritual union, whereby the will is, so to speak, transformed into that end – and this belongs to charity.[32]

Regarding the cardinal virtues, Aquinas follows classic philosophical (e.g. Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) and theological (e.g. Gregory I's *Moralia in Job* II) texts in emphasizing these four. He argues that their primacy can be seen by considering their mode, matter, and subject: In terms of the mode in which they operate, it is essential to virtuous action that it be characterized by "directive knowledge, rightness, stability, and moderation"[33] – and each cardinal virtue displays one of these in a special way. Further, although other virtues share these general modes, the matter of each cardinal virtue is especially important: for example, fortitude regards standing firm against the greatest peril (violent death) and temperance regards restraint in the face of the greatest (bodily) pleasures. Finally, the cardinal virtues represent the four virtue-relevant powers of the human psyche: "prudence is in reason, justice in will, fortitude in the irascible, and temperance in the concupiscible, which are the only powers that can be the principles of a human or a voluntary act."[34] Each cardinal virtue serves not only as an important virtue in its own right but also as a category for other, related virtues (its "potential parts" [see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 48, art. 1]): for example, humility is placed under temperance and perseverance under courage.[35] Each of these virtues "falls short" of its related cardinal virtue in some way; some exceed their cardinal virtue in other ways.[36]

[32] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 62, art. 3; see *Disputed Questions on the Virtues in General*, art. 10.

[33] Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues*, trans. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), a. 1.

[34] *Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues*, art. 1; see *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 61, art. 2.

[35] For discussion, see Heidi M. Giebel and Benjamin Huff, "Justice, Benevolence, and Friendship: A Confucian Revision to Thomistic Ethics?" in *The Wisdom of Youth: Essays Inspired by the Early Work of Jacques and Raissa Maritain*, ed. Travis Dumsday (Washington, DC: American Maritain Association and The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 320–329; cf. Daniel Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 198ff.

[36] *Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues*, art. 1 ad 12: "It should be said that the cardinal virtues are called more principal, not because they are more perfect than all the other virtues, but because

Interestingly, Peterson and Seligman, pioneers of the contemporary positive psychology movement, proposed a strikingly similar overall categorization scheme for their list of twenty-four character strengths. They used six main virtues – wisdom, justice, courage, temperance, transcendence, and humanity – as categories into which the strengths fall; here "transcendence" looks like a combination of faith and hope, while "humanity" seems to denote a secularized version of charity.[37]

Much more could be said about Thomistic cardinal and theological virtues, and their relationships to each other and to the other virtues, than I have space to address here.[38] For present purposes, we will have to limit ourselves to discussion of a few key topics. We will turn next to the possibility of a unity of the virtues. In Section 4, we will note how the structure of Thomistic virtue ethics that may suggest promising avenues for moral development and character education.

3.2 *Unity of the Virtues?*

As with the ability to "use willpower" without using it up, observers might at first be puzzled by a Thomistically virtuous agent's possession of so many seemingly diverse ethical virtues: three theological, four cardinal, and numerous "part" virtues. How can one person manage to develop virtuous habits in so many different areas? Well, as one familiar with Aquinas's Aristotelian philosophical roots might have predicted, the virtues form a sort of unity – at least to some extent, they come as a package, such that any concentrated effort to develop one of them will spill over into the development of others.

The unity of virtue has been a matter of perennial debate in philosophical virtue ethics; entering that debate is well beyond the scope of this chapter. For present purposes, we will focus on *how* the virtues are united on Aquinas's account – which will give us some insight into how the virtuous

human life more principally turns on them and the other virtues are based on them." E.g., although religion falls short of the "equality" aspect of justice, it exceeds justice insofar as it is ordered "directly and immediately ordered to the honor of God"; *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 81, art. 6.

[37] Peterson and Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues*; an overview of their classification is also available at https://viacharacter.org/character-strengths. (For discussion, see my "Aquinas the Social Scientist? Thomistic Moral Philosophy and Contemporary Psychology," in *Facts Are Stubborn Things: Thomistic Perspectives in the Philosophies of Nature and Science*, ed. Matthew Minerd [Washington, DC: AMA/CUA, 2020], 250–266, at 252–253.)

[38] For more on relationships between the virtues, see Mark O'Keefe, OSB, *Virtues Abounding: St. Thomas Aquinas on the Cardinal and Related Virtues for Today* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019); and Romanus Cessario, OP, *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

life is cultivated and lived out. At the outset, we should note that "imperfect moral virtues" – simple inclinations to do good deeds – aren't necessarily connected at all. For example, we all know someone who tends to be giving but does not behave temperately or who often acts kindly but almost never bravely; those folks do not serve as counterexamples to Aquinas's claims. It is "perfect moral virtues" – habits that incline us to do good deeds *consistently and well* – that are connected, and that in a few ways.

First, Aquinas argues, we can see the connection among the cardinal virtues by considering their general properties: We associate prudence with discretion, justice with rectitude (rightness), temperance with moderation, and fortitude with strength of mind. Although these associations make sense, the general properties are in an important sense universal. That is, to lack any of those qualities is not just to act without that particular virtue, but to act without exercising virtue *at all*: indiscretion, immoderation, weak-mindedness, or of course outright wrongness will vitiate any action (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 65, art. 1; *Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues*, art. 2).[39] So the moral virtues are united in a general way through exercise of properties associated with all four cardinal virtues.

Second, and following Aristotle, the virtues are connected through prudence: Moral virtues all involve making good choices – selecting suitable means – which is the domain of prudence; and prudence requires inclination toward a good end, which is the domain of moral virtue. So, again in a rather general way, all moral virtues are united via their good end and good means.

Thus far, Aquinas's account of the unity of virtue seems more palatable and less controversial than one might expect. He doesn't claim, for example, that there are no distinctions among virtues, or that the virtuous person must possess all virtues to the same degree,[40] but that the virtues share good properties (discretion, moderation, strength of mind, and rightness), good ends, and good means. His third and final argument for virtues' unity, though, draws from his account of supernatural virtues; thus it will obviously be less persuasive to secular readers, who may prefer to stick with the first two arguments.

[39] For discussion of arguments for a general unity of virtue, see Christopher Toner, "The Unity of the Virtues Revisited," in *Handbuch Tugend und Tugendethik*, ed. Christoph Halbig and Felix Timmermann (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021), 65–79, esp. 72–76.

[40] At least not practically speaking: Aquinas argues (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 66, art. 2; *Disputed Questions on the Cardinal Virtues*, art. 3) that although a person has all virtues equally with regard to form (reason's or charity's guidance of the appetites), with regard to matter (actual inclination to perform the relevant actions), there can be significant variation.

As we have seen, along with the dual *telos* of the virtuous life, Aquinas posits dual versions of the moral virtues: Each has a natural or acquired version aimed at our natural good (a good earthly life) and developed through a quasi-natural process of habituation, and a higher, supernatural variety aimed at our supernatural end (eternal life) and received into the soul only via direct infusion. Regarding this latter type of virtue, Aquinas approvingly quotes Augustine's description of virtue as a quality that "God works in us, without us."[41] The higher versions of the moral virtues are united through charity, which "informs" (i.e. gives form to) the virtues by directing them to its own end of union with God.[42] This argument, then, specifies the good end by which the virtues are united and outlines the process (a friendship-enabling infusion of grace) that unites them in that end.

Having considered the cardinal and theological virtues and their connections in an abstract way, we will turn next to more concrete Thomistic guidance for developing the virtues. Along the way, we'll note relevant psychological parallels.

4 Developing Thomistic Virtue

When considering Thomistic guidance for developing the virtues, it may be helpful to begin with some general ways in which the connections Aquinas draws between the moral virtues can suggest common methods for cultivating them. Then we'll move on to some Thomistic ideas for cultivating specific moral virtues – and, where applicable, we'll note how these ideas relate to empirical studies of these virtues and their development.

When considering general Thomistic strategies for virtue cultivation, we might first note that relationships between virtues are multifold, such that a virtue may both be categorized primarily under one cardinal virtue and also notably related to another. Primary categorization is according to the mode in which a virtue operates (e.g. by overcoming difficulties or by giving another what is due) rather than its subject (e.g. the irascible or concupiscible appetite) or its matter (e.g. fear or physical pleasure), because the mode constitutes the virtue's form – and "in everything form is of more account than matter";[43] hence, for example, the primary home for perseverance, whose mode is "standing firm against the difficulty arising from length of time," under fortitude. But in terms of subject or matter, a virtue

[41] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 55, art. 4. [42] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 23, art. 8 ad 3.
[43] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 137, art. 2 ad 1.

may also be related to another cardinal one: For example, patience, although it falls under the heading of fortitude, resides in the concupiscible appetite along with temperance.[44] These three types of connection among virtues (via mode, matter, and subject) may suggest promising avenues for moral development and character education: For example, although perseverance falls under fortitude because of their similarity of mode, its sharing the matter of "pains of touch" (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 137, art. 2, obj. 1) with temperance suggests that promising strategies for growing in perseverance may include, in addition to building up the stamina to stand firm, changing our responses to pleasure and pain.[45]

Second, and more generally, the connections between, and quasi-hierarchical organization of, the virtues suggest that in our efforts at moral development and character education we need not address every virtue to the same extent – and, in fact, we may not need to address every virtue directly at all. Selectively targeting virtues to develop (e.g. the cardinal virtues – targeting each main mode of exercising virtue – and perhaps a few other virtues especially relevant to our context) may be more effective. And that strategy almost certainly will be much more manageable than attempting to target dozens of virtues at once.[46]

Third, despite virtue-based ethical theories' reputation for giving limited guidance regarding our actions, it is noteworthy that Aquinas's virtue theory is linked to, and itself includes, both general principles of right action and specific moral commands and prohibitions. As we saw in Section 3.1, Aquinas precedes his discussion of virtue with a treatise on action; there, he notes that good actions must be good in object, end, and circumstance (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 18, art. 1–4). And he follows it with a treatise on law, where he argues that, in a general way, acting according to virtue just is acting according to natural (i.e. moral) law: In both cases, we are acting according to the directives of well-functioning reason (*Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 94, art. 3). Further, the treatises on the cardinal virtues in Part IIaIIae often give very clear guidance regarding

[44] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 136, art. 4, ad 2.

[45] Perhaps relatedly, studies of willpower as a psychological quality have linked it to both perseverance and temperance. See Baumeister and Tierney, *Willpower*, 36–37; and my "Aquinas the Social Scientist," 259–263. For an example of connection via mode, Juliette Ratchford, Timothy Pawl, and Sarah Schnitker discuss four different types of Thomistic endurance (patience, perseverance, constancy, and longsuffering) in "Patience, Perseverance, and Goal Pursuit: Philosophical and Psychological Analysis of Aquinas's Distinctions," in *Endurance*, ed. Nathan L. King (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025).

[46] Although I'm not familiar with the details of the program, the Virtues Project looks like it attempts just that: www.virtuesproject.com/education.

acts required or forbidden by particular virtues. For example, we learn that we are bound to love God, ourselves, our neighbors, and even our enemies – but not our dogs – out of charity, and that love of enemies doesn't necessarily require actively befriending them (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 25); that drinking intoxicants in moderation "is most profitable, while immoderate excess therein is most harmful, since it hinders the use of reason even more than excessive eating" (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 149, art. 1); and that it's not a good idea for priests to perform executions (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 64, art. 4).

Having considered some general Thomistic guidance for cultivating the life of virtue, let's consider his treatment of the two cardinal virtues governing the sensitive appetites: fortitude and temperance.

Fortitude: Like Aristotle, Aquinas argues that the virtue of fortitude is primarily concerned with fear of danger – particularly, with continuing to pursue the good despite risk of death (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, qu. 2, art. 5). Despite this seemingly narrow focus, though, fortitude helps us face a wide range of fears and obstacles; as Aquinas says, those capable of standing firm in the face of the greatest of evils can also stand up to lesser ones (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 2 ad 2, cf. IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 4). And although threats of death are rare for most of us, he argues, the *occasion* of such threats is more common insofar as the pursuit of justice tends to produce enemies (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 11 ad 3). So we have more opportunities to practice fortitude than it might at first seem.

Fortitude, Aquinas explains, is more about moderating fear than daring, "since the danger which is the object of daring and fear, tends by its very nature to check daring, but to increase fear";[47] thus its principal act is endurance rather than aggression. And enduring is more difficult than attacking: It implies being attacked by someone stronger, withstanding an already-present danger, and persisting in firmness for a greater length of time (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 6 ad 1). This insight suggests that strategies for growing in fortitude might include developing its endurance-related "part" virtues of patience and perseverance – and these two virtues have the advantages of more-ubiquitous and less-threatening matter (delays being more common and less frightening than death). So perhaps we can start with these two virtues and work our way up to true fortitude.

[47] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 6.

When is daring the appropriate exercise of fortitude, then? When "it is necessary to dispel [dangers] altogether in order to free oneself therefrom for the future."[48] How should we go about doing so? Through moderate (i.e. reason-guided) use of anger, Aquinas answers: We can use it as a tool to fuel our virtuous attack on the cause of our fear (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 10). This is not a pleasant process, just as fear and pain are themselves unpleasant; the best we can expect is the spiritual pleasure that comes from acting virtuously – which will likely be felt less intensely than our physical pain (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 10). But it suffices for fortitude that we choose the higher good over the avoidance of pain; and having realistic expectations regarding how we'll feel when exercising this virtue may help prepare us to exercise it.[49]

A final fortitude-specific observation Aquinas makes is that "fear is born of love" (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 4 ad 2), which suggests that another method for cultivating fortitude is reflecting on whether the good we pursue is sufficiently noble to justify the risk – and, if so, cultivating and focusing on our love for that good. After all, the dearer something is to us, the more we should be motivated to pursue it and willing to suffer for its sake (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 3). And, as Aquinas suggests in the next question, "the good of reason consists in the truth as its proper object, and in justice as its proper effect";[50] if we can increase our love for truth and justice specifically, we should be well on our way to growing in fortitude.

Temperance: Unlike fortitude, temperance has for its matter actions and temptations we encounter every day: those related to (disgraceful instances of) physical pleasure.[51] So we have frequent, danger-free opportunities to develop and exercise this virtue – and correspondingly frequent opportunities to fail.

Failures in temperance, Aquinas argues, are more voluntary individually but less voluntary generically than failures in fortitude. No one wants to be intemperate, but many of us are enticed by particular pleasures contrary to temperance. But that problem suggests its own solution: "Hence the most effective remedy against intemperance is not to dwell on the consideration

[48] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 123, art. 3.

[49] For example, we might form a specific "implementation intention," as psychologists call it: e.g., when faced with danger *x*, I'll respond with daring action *y*. See Baumeister and Tierney, *Willpower*, 227–231.

[50] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 124, art. 1.

[51] As Aquinas notes, there are plenty of instances of physical pleasure that are *not* disgraceful – those that are conducive to health, and, in moderation, those at least not detrimental to it (*Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 141, art. 6 ad 2; cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, bk. III, ch. 11).

of singulars."[52] Perhaps Aquinas's advice sounds simplistic, but empirical research supports it. To dislodge ourselves from the here-and-now thinking that encourages yielding to present temptations, thinking about higher – more noble or transcendent, or even just more abstract – things is surprisingly effective.[53] Further, Aquinas, following Augustine, notes that this strategy works not just in the short term but also as a method for developing a *habitus*: "Lust served became custom, and custom not resisted became necessity"; but "if the mind be lifted up to spiritual things, and remain fixed 'thereon, the impulse of custom,' i.e. carnal concupiscence, 'is broken, and being suppressed is gradually weakened'."[54] These temptations, though lessened, may continue to exist even after we develop the virtue of temperance; and awareness of that fact may help prepare us to face them.[55]

Another approach that Aquinas's work on temperance suggests, one that works with our tendency toward here-and-now thinking rather than against it, is enlisting accountability. Shamefacedness (fear of disgrace[56]) is, Aquinas explains, a strong motivator – so much so that he categorizes it as an integral part (component) of temperance. To increase our motivation to avoid disgraceful acts, then, we can increase the disgrace (loss of reputation) attached to them by making ourselves accountable to others – especially those who know us well or whom we respect:

> People of the better sort make us ashamed for the same reason as those who are more closely connected with us; because just as the attestation of the better men carries more weight since they have a more universal knowledge of things, and in their judgments hold fast to the truth: so, too, the attestation of those among whom we live is more cogent since they know more about our concerns in detail.[57]

So for those of us who have limited success with lifting our minds to higher things, the weight of others' attestation might do the trick.[58]

[52] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 142, art. 3.
[53] Baumeister and Tierney, *Willpower*, 159–166; Kentaro Fujita, Yaacov Trope, Nira Liberman, and Maya Levin-Sagi, "Construal Levels and Self-Control," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 90 (2006): 351–367.
[54] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 142, art. 2; see Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII.5 and *Music*. VI.11.
[55] McGonigal suggests something similar with regard to dopamine awareness in *The Willpower Instinct*, ch. 4.
[56] Aquinas discusses fear both of doing disgraceful or base actions and of reproach by others for doing such actions; with accountability, the focus is primarily on the latter.
[57] *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 142, art. 3 ad 1.
[58] Baumeister and Tierney discuss accountability in *Willpower*, 171–178; it's also a key component of twelve-step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous.

5 Conclusion

If this chapter has accomplished its primary purpose, we are left with a big-picture familiarity with Aquinas's account of the virtuous life. It is a life of joyful and purposeful disposition, with appetites in harmony with well-functioning reason, aimed (in the case of the acquired virtues) at our natural good of a fulfilling human life and (in the case of the infused virtues) at our supernatural *telos* of eternal beatitude. It is a life of *many* virtues, organized under the headings of the cardinal and theological virtues; connected by mode, matter, and subject; and united through good properties, good means, and a good end. And it is a life filled with hope for cultivating those virtues, both through habituation and infusion.

As Aquinas, following Aristotle, points out (see, e.g., *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 94, art. 2), practical knowledge is directed toward action: We should *seek* the good we understand. So if this chapter has a secondary purpose, perhaps it is that Aquinas's account will inspire us to grow in virtue.[59]

[59] I thank Brandon Dahm, Matthew Kent, Mathew Lu, Tim Pawl, and Mark Spencer for helpful comments and suggestions. I owe my appreciation of the big picture of Aquinas's ethical theory to Alfred Freddoso; and I owe much of my understanding of the relationships among virtues to †Alina Beary.

CHAPTER 10

Thomistic Free Expression

Janice Chik Breidenbach

1 Introduction

1.1 Aquinas and the Contemporary Context

Contemporary political and legal scholarship addressing the topic of "free speech" or "free expression" is preoccupied with questions of legal status and "coverage": What expressive forms are included in or excluded by legal protections afforded by the state? The medieval thinker Thomas Aquinas hardly addresses this question at all. Instead, his approach to speech and the powers of human expression is primarily metaphysical, not practically oriented. His systematic treatment of human language emphasizes important biological features that potentially place human beings within an evolutionary, animalist context. Simultaneously, he draws similarities between human speech and angelic communication that would place our topic within the discourse of speculative theology.

What then is the potential of a *politically* oriented account of "Thomistic free expression"? My response to this challenge is multipronged. First, I define Aquinas's unique animalist approach as producing a biologically centered concept of human agency, particularly with respect to the powers of expression that in human beings is *loquutio* and not merely *vox*. I show that an animalist account of human speech holds more relevance for a political theory of speech and expression than frequently is admitted in the contemporary scholarship. In particular, I argue that a Thomistic account of human speech as being a special kind of animal communication is uniquely positioned to untangle some of the conceptual knots that currently ensnare free speech defenders: How can speech be "absolutely free" and yet also conditionally regulated?

The key to understanding Aquinas's account is through a lens that is at once animalist and also spiritual: We might call it a *hylomorphic* account. Human speech refers both to animal communication and a capacity for

query, a uniquely rational power that treats *vox* as *explanandum*. The significance of discursive communication is illuminated by Aquinas's speculative treatment of rational incorporeal substances, or angels. Angelic communication obviously shares no similarity with animal *vox*, but Aquinas's examination of its locutionary structure reveals a multipurpose scheme: *Loquutio* is not only informative or revelatory from a second-person perspective but also consultatory from that perspective, and clarificatory from the first-person perspective. Whether angels exist or not within one's metaphysical picture, Aquinas's examination of their spiritual discourse supports an interpretive account of how *vox* and *loquutio* can concern the same subject and yet represent entirely different modes of communicative intelligence.[1]

The contemporary stance on free speech and expression suggests ambivalence about whether speech must be for the sake of truth. On one hand, the approach of many defenders of free expression ground their case in the values of individual authenticity, political legitimacy, and personal fulfillment. These values are upheld independently of truth content. Even if my expression is false, what matters is its "authenticity-making" power, its validation of my political dignity, the legitimization of my thoughts made public. I call this cluster of related ideas about authenticity and personal fulfilment the Authenticity Principle: Speech is valuable because by its very performance it creates human value. Its value is grounded not in the content of what is uttered but in the fact that the utterance or bodily expression of my thought is *mine*.[2] On the other hand, slander, detraction, and falsely shouting "Fire!" in a crowded theater are not protected by law no matter how deeply felt they may be as authentic fulfilments of a speaker's free expression. The legal precedent for denying free speech protections of any human utterance whatsoever is a claim I call No Absolutism. The latter poses an obvious problem for the Authenticity Principle, however: either speech is valuable for reasons advanced by the Authenticity Principle or these reasons are defeasible

[1] I defend this account in Section 3.3. Aquinas's treatise on angels is significant, *not* because angels have a place in human politics. Notably, James Madison famously entertained such a prospect: "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary" (James Madison, "The Structure of the Government Must Furnish the Proper Checks and Balances between the Different Departments," *The Federalist* 51 (1788), https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-51-60). For a Thomist, Madison's comment wrongly assumes (1) angels that are infallible and (2) goodness implies that government is unnecessary.

[2] There could be a neo-Cartesian formulation to such expressionism. "I express my thoughts – therefore I exist as a political participant – *I am*."

by external factors – in which case the value of speech cannot be confidently upheld in any context. If freedom of speech is conferred only to the extent that it is deemed harmful, then free speech is unprincipled: It cannot in fact stand upon any ground that assumes the Authenticity Principle.

In the modern scholarship on civil liberties, the Authenticity Principle and No Absolutism form two pillars on which free expression theories stand. Questions of "coverage" are commonly raised as bearing preeminent importance, since the consensus about speech is that it has no absolute freedom, and therefore priority is placed on how to differentiate speech that *is* protected by law from speech that is *not* protected. Authenticity comes to have a secondary importance against the imperative of discerning the question of coverage, in the context of No Absolutism.

In the background of these questions, Aquinas's treatment of human speech and expression offers a unique resolution to the conflict posed by the contemporary context. He affirms the authenticity-making value of speech, but without taking this value to be the exclusive determinant of speech's justification. His account simultaneously agrees with No Absolutism, since he excludes morally pernicious forms of lying (especially slander and detraction) from being tolerated in political society. Lying by itself has little to do with Aquinas's concept of human speech that I argue we should affirm as valuable without abridgments. Where only *loquutio* is concerned, a Thomistic account of free speech therefore can affirm neither the Authenticity Principle nor No Absolutism.

Aquinas retains the role of truth in human language as a guiding principle (call this Truth in Speech). Minimally, such a principle requires us to hold *some* concern for the truth of what we say, regardless of whether it *is* (or is judged to be) true. Truth in Speech casts doubt on modern conceptions of expression which derive value exclusively from the Authenticity Principle, and as restricted only by No Absolutism. If we believe that the value of the activities protected by civil liberties is grounded on the fact that such activities could or should be productive of truth or meaning for human life – a meaning that has consensus value for a community – then these freedoms cannot be valuable only because they are personally fulfilling, authentic, or generative of political legitimacy. For however authentic the expression, and however much it may be held with conviction, mere expression is compatible with a failure to be concerned with truth.[3] Aquinas's concept of *loquutio*, in contrast, involves linguistic acts that

[3] Consider Plato's *pistis*, or conviction: beliefs that may be held with fervor, independently of one's reasons for holding them.

proceed beyond mere utterance or assertion of ideas, beliefs, or opinions. Unlike its animal counterpart *vox*, the human form of *loquutio* is a compelling candidate for absolutist theories of free speech because it is essentially ordered against malicious falsehood. I will defend Aquinas's account of *loquutio* as the characteristic form of reasonable discourse, which is subject to no abridgements (even from No Absolutism), even as it may realize some of the aims held by the Authenticity Principle.

1.2 *Two Pillars of Modern Thought about Speech*

The Authenticity Principle offers a modern paradigm in which the value of expression can be ascertained while retaining neutrality to content. Expression is valuable because it affirms speech in general, and not any particular speaker or, indeed, any particular speech. Consequently, the modern construal of "free speech" includes much more than just the written and spoken word. Frederick Schauer observes:

> Most liberal democracies, after all, now understand the right to include a wide range of symbolic and communicative but non-linguistic forms of public speaking and public protest, including marching, picketing, parading, sign-carrying, armband-wearing, flag-waving, flag-burning, effigy-burning, and much more of this non-linguistic character, none of which activities would be described as "speech" in the ordinary English-language sense of that word.[4]

The modern concept expands its reach to forms of expression that are nonlinguistic because conduct can be expressive.

Conduct can, however, be proscribed on the basis of its content. The principle of No Absolutism attempts to establish the boundaries of what forms of expression are or are not acceptable. Even if murder is (non-satirically) considered as one of the fine arts, its expressive intention would not prevail against the unacceptability of such conduct.[5] Thus Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. famously remarked: "The First Amendment, while prohibiting legislation against free speech as such, cannot have been, and obviously was not, intended to give immunity for every possible use of language."[6]

[4] Frederick Schauer, "What Is Speech? The Question of Coverage," in *The Oxford Handbook of Freedom of Speech*, ed. Adrienne Stone and Frederick Schauer (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 160.

[5] A case in point is Thomas de Quincey's "On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts," which was a satirical essay published in 1827 in *Blackwood's Magazine*: https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/10708.

[6] *Frohwerk* v. *United States*, 249 U.S. 204 (1919): 249.

Stanley Fish argues that there is a further consequence of No Absolutism: It essentially entails that the Authenticity Principle cannot possibly ground "free speech."

> The good news is that precisely *because* speech is never "free" in the two senses required – free of consequences and free from state pressure – speech always matters, is always doing work; because everything we say impinges on the world in ways indistinguishable from the effects of physical action, we must take responsibility for our verbal performances – *all* of them – and not assume that they are being taken cares of by a clause in the Constitution. Of course, with responsibility comes risks, but they have always been our risks, and no doctrine of free speech has ever insulated us from them. They are the risks, respectively, of permitting speech that does obvious harm and of shutting off speech in ways that might deny us the benefit of Joyce's *Ulysses* or Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover* or Titian's paintings. Nothing, I repeat, can insulate us from those risks.[7]

Fish urges resistance against what he calls the "no-exit end":

> If our commitment to freedom of speech is so strong that it obliges us, as Holmes declares, to tolerate "opinions . . . we . . . believe to be fraught with death" (a characterization that recognizes the awful consequentiality of speech and implicitly undercuts any speech/action distinction), then we are being asked to court our own destruction for the sake of an abstraction that may doom us rather than save us.[8]

Together, the pillars of Authenticity and No Absolutism are built on a foundational assumption: that "freedom of speech" simply is freedom of *expression*. Instead of attempting to make principled distinctions among varieties of expression, the modern prescription grants liberty of expression first with unspecified coverage, and then allows for generous, sometimes ad hoc exceptions to the legal protections afforded. The result is a minimally informative account of "free speech," which maximizes potential for controversy over coverage issues. In the worst case, we must accept Fish's conclusion that there is, in fact, "no such thing as free speech" at all. Alternatively, we might countenance some weakened form of expression that simply is an authentic expression of one's self, tolerated by law so long as it is neither "fraught with death" or deemed otherwise intolerable. In the end, the two modern pillars of free speech leave us without a principled account of speech at all.

[7] Stanley Fish, "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech, and It's a Good Thing, Too* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 114–115.

[8] Fish, "There's No Such Thing as Free Speech," 119.

2 Two Concepts of Expression in Aquinas

2.1 Vox

It would be anachronistic, of course, to claim that Aquinas solves the modern perplexity about speech. However, Aquinas provides an enduringly insightful framework about human expression, and its distinction within animal communication, of which it would be egregious to overlook. Indeed, I will argue that the cost of doing so is the opportunity to reconcile what is true about both the Authenticity Principle as well as No Absolutism, without implicating a conflict that forecloses free speech itself.

Aristotle begins his inquiry in *Politics* with observations on animal life and communication. In his *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, Aquinas remarks:[9]

> We perceive that although some other animals have vocal power, human beings, alone among animals, have the power of speech. For although some animals utter human speech, they do not speak in the strict sense, since they do not understand what they are saying. Rather, they utter such sounds as a result of training. And there is a difference between speech and pure vocal sound. For vocal sound signifies pain and pleasure, and so other emotions, such as anger and fear, all of which are directed to pleasure and pain, as Aristotle says in the *Ethics*. And so vocal sound is given to other animals. And their nature allows them to experience sense pleasures and pains and to communicate the fact to one another by certain natural vocal sounds, as lions do by roaring, and dogs do by barking. And we substitute exclamations for such sounds.[10]

The animal vocal power, *vox*, is an expressive capacity attributed especially to those animals that Aristotle calls "gregarious": honeybees dance, whales sound off, songbirds twitter, elk bellow, and wolves howl – a few examples among *many* possible variations of vocalizations of which the gregarious species are capable. Notably, humans share this power with such

[9] Aquinas's remarks here bear similarities to his earlier claims in *De regno ad regem Cypri* (published 1267), compared with his *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, published 1271–1272. The relevant passages in *De regno* include I.7: "The use of speech is a prerogative proper to man. By this means, one man is able fully to express his conceptions to others. Other animals, it is true, give vent to other feelings in various fashions. But man communicates with his kind more completely than any other animal known to be gregarious, such as the crane, the ant or the bee. With this in mind, Solomon says: 'It is better that there be two than one; for they have the advantage of their company.'" Aquinas, *De regno ad regem Cypri*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan, revised Ignatius T. Eschmann, ed. Joseph Kenny (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), https://isidore.co/aquinas/DeRegno.htm.

[10] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, trans. Richard J. Regan (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2007), 16–17.

other animals: *Vox* is not a specific differentiator of other animals from humanity, for, as Aquinas notes, "we substitute exclamations for such sounds." The human forms of animal expression, or *vox* might consist of a grunt or a shout or a scoff, in the case of the human voice, or might involve the use of artificial *vox*, like emergency vehicle sirens, or the beeping of alarms and timers.

Vox in the natural world is not, however, mindless, mechanical, or unintelligent. The vocalization of wolves is incredibly varied in its forms and purposes. The wolf howl has been found to express individuality, conveying nuances about one's environment, subjective behavior, and emotional disposition.[11] Even the dance of a honeybee is well known to contain complex directional information, exhibiting understanding of second-person perspective in the receptivity of this information, as well as functional discrimination of one's audience.[12] Following Aristotle, Aquinas grants that some animals may possess some variant of *phronesis*, a form of intelligence ordered toward action, whose form and meaning in the animal case (e.g. wolves, honeybees, orcas) can apparently be communicated through *vox*. Although *phronesis* is paradigmatically prudence, a human and intellectual virtue, an animal variant is possible because "prudence makes provision for the future from memory of the past" – and memory is a capacity shared by many nonhuman animals.[13]

Animal *vox* may not be in itself propositional, but it suggests its own form of truth and truth-makers. When a wolf howls to signal its location, it communicates something real in the world, a reality both perceived by the one communicating and the ones listening. This reality can also be internal to the agent: A male songbird communicates his desire to find a mate through chirps and trills. Felines purr, we interpret, to express their pleasure; a horse neighs because it is annoyed.

In these respects, human *vox* is an expressive power that fulfils the expectations laid out by the Authenticity Principle. It can be symbolic, communicative, and nonlinguistic. And yet, Aquinas will argue, *vox* cannot be the best distinguishing feature of human communication. For "man

[11] John Theberge and Bruce Falls, "Howling as a Means of Communication in Timber Wolves," *American Zoologist* 7:2 (2015): 331–338, https://academic.oup.com/icb/article/7/2/331/105672.

[12] The scout who performs the dance will focus on an area of the honeycomb where the foragers wait.

[13] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, I.11, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1961). In §11, Aquinas qualifies that "prudence has one meaning in the case of brute animals and another in the case of men. Men are prudent inasmuch as they deliberate rationally about what they ought to do," whereas "in other animals prudence is a natural estimate about the pursuit of what is fitting and the avoidance of what is harmful, as a lamb follows its mother and runs away from a wolf."

is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious [*agelaion*[14]] animal," argues Aristotle: "man alone of the animals possesses speech [*logos*]" (1253a8–11). Human speech is what Aquinas will identify as the power of *loquutio*, while Aristotle's "mere voice (*phonē*)" is Aquinas's *vox*, which "can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to signify those sensations to one another" (1253a11–14).

2.2 Loquutio

Aristotle argues that human speech

> is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state. (1253a14–19)

On this section of *Politics*, Aquinas comments:

> Human speech signifies useful and harmful things, and so just and unjust things, since justice and injustice consists of persons being treated justly or unjustly regarding useful and harmful things. And so speech is proper to human beings, since it is proper to them, in contrast with other animals, to have knowledge of good and evil, just and unjust, and the like, which speech can signify. Nature gives speech to human beings, and speech is directed to human beings communicating with one another regarding the useful and the harmful, the just and the unjust, and the like. Therefore, since nature does nothing in vain, human beings by nature communicate with one another about these things. But communication about these things produces the household and the political community. Therefore, human beings are by nature domestic and political animals.[15]

Aquinas's commentary develops the Aristotelian thesis in several important respects. First, Aquinas clarifies an important relationship between *vox* and *loquutio* that is easily overlooked. The argument requires defining human speech, *loquutio*, as a power that negotiates the communication of useful and harmful things, on one hand, and just and unjust things, on the other. In both Aristotle's and Aquinas's

[14] The Greek term translated as "gregarious," derived from *agelē*, connotes herding animal groups that gather together to feed in common as a multitude.
[15] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, 17.

texts, both justice and the useful (and their opposites) are mentioned, but as becomes clear, *loquutio* does not deal equally with these subjects, because justice and the useful (and injustice and the harmful) are not respectively the same in concept. The distinction of human *loquutio* is that it is capable of signifying *more* than merely what is useful or harmful. If it was not, then animal *vox* should not be defined as that power which essentially communicates painful and pleasant sensations. It is because animal communication is defined as the power encompassing these subjects that human speech negotiates justice and injustice.[16] The relationship between the pleasant (and painful) versus the just (and unjust) is that of *explanandum* and *explanans*: human speech uniquely illuminates *why* we abhor the painful and pursue the pleasant. Like other animals, we communicate with one another about the useful, the harmful, the pleasant, and the emotionally charged. Unlike any other animal, we seek to formulate judgments concerning these observations: these analyses amount to discussion of *justice* and *injustice*.[17]

Second, Aquinas develops Aristotle's thesis by specifying the location of the subject and significance of speech within the speaker themself: The matter of justice or injustice is constituted by *persons* who are treated justly or unjustly, and therefore it is also *persons* who so treat others. This means that we cannot regard justice or injustice merely as a description of events, of occurrences that have happened to us. For a non-rational animal, pain or pleasure, the harmful or the useful, are phenomena that may have no explanation or intelligible cause; perhaps the majority of animals are incapable even of searching for one. For humans, however, harm often has a moral significance, and in this case it has a perpetrator. Therefore the useful or pleasant likewise may be credited to a conscious agent, and *this*, Aquinas argues, is a causal connection that human speech, *loquutio*, is uniquely adapted to negotiate.

[16] A cursory gloss might produce the interpretation that Aquinas is defining human speech in terms of its ability to discuss "the useful and the harmful, the just and the unjust, and the like." But this is not what he says in the first instance: "human speech signifies useful and harmful things, *and so* just and unjust things, since justice and injustice consists of persons being treated justly or unjustly *regarding* useful and harmful things" (italics mine).

[17] Aristotle's account in *Politics* of the distinctiveness of human speech is that it uniquely constitutes us as *political* animals, which denotes a category distinct from the merely social. The claim that human beings are social animals does not ipso facto amount to the claim that we are political. Hannah Arendt defends this division more sharply: For her, the political is not identical with the social. Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

2.3 Loquutio *as Symbolic Speech*

Since Aquinas's argument has biological implications, we might ask: How does the Thomistic account fare in the face of modern empirical sciences? The honeybee is claimed by some scientists as "one of the model symbolic animals for biological studies," said to possess "sophisticated symbol communication" through its waggle dance.[18] There is no doubt that the honeybee's behavior is meaningful in a social way: It intends to communicate meaning through a form or pattern of movement that is not in itself directly related to this meaning. Some philosophers, like Susanne Langer, prefer to say that these animals possess "signage" rather than "symbols," reserving symbol-use as a unique designator of human beings. The use of signs "is an ever evolving, ever improving function throughout the whole animal kingdom, from the lowly worm that shrinks into his hole at the sound of an approaching foot, to the dog obeying his master's command, and even to the learned scientist who watches the movements of an index needle."[19] But a sign is not a symbol; only human animals are capable of using symbols in addition to signs. According to Langer:

> The difference between a sign and a symbol is, in brief, that a sign causes us to think or act *in face* of the thing signified, whereas a symbol causes us to think *about* the thing symbolized. Therein lies the great importance of symbolism for human life, its power to make this life so different from any other animal biography that generations of men have found it incredible to suppose that they were of purely zoological origin. A sign is always embedded in reality, in a present that emerges from the actual past and stretches to the future; but a symbol may be divorced from reality altogether. It may refer to what is not the case, to a mere idea, a figment, a dream. It serves, therefore, to liberate thought from the immediate stimuli of a physically present world; and that liberation marks the essential difference between human and nonhuman mentality. Animals think, but they think *of* and *at* things; men think primarily *about* things.[20]

The distinction between sign and symbol allows us to retain the distinction of human language among animal communication, while also

[18] Hiroyuki Ai, Ryuichi Okada, Midori Sakura, Thomas Wachtler, and Hidestoshi Ikeno, "Neuroethology of the Waggle Dance: How Followers Interact with the Waggle Dancer and Detect Spatial Information," *insects* 10:10 (2019): 336, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6835826.

[19] Susanne K. Langer, "Language and Thought," in *Reflections on Language*, ed. Stuart Hirschberg and Terry Hirschberg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 74.

[20] Langer, "Language and Thought," 73.

attributing intelligent communication to nonhuman animals.[21] However, the coherence of Langer's distinction might be challenged by the consideration that a dog can salivate at the thought of food even when no food is present, since a dog can be taught the *meaning* of the word "chicken," for instance, or even trained to associate the sound of a mere clicker with the idea of chicken. This indicates that such a dog is acting or thinking not "in the face of the thing signified," as Langer argues, but rather thinking "*about* the thing symbolized." If the distinction between signs and symbols turns on whether or not the thing considered is "embedded" or "divorced from" reality, what difference is there in the way a dog reacts to a speaker who says "chicken" and the way a philosopher considers the concept of "chicken" or "chicken-ness"?

It is in response to this objection that Aquinas's approach might be adapted to offer clarity. *Loquutio* is uniquely human speech. What makes *loquutio* distinctive is not so much that we are able to share our sense experiences, or emotional states, or even our statements of intention to act with other members of our species. Other animals do precisely all of these things through *vox*. *Loquutio* is the power of articulating our perceptions of pleasure and pain qua good and evil, or qua just and unjust.[22] This ability is grounded in the abstraction of symbolism, which in turn forms the basis of political life: As Aquinas comments, "communicating these perceptions produces households and political communities."[23]

Consider, however, the objection that even animal noises, unintelligible screams of disgust or disapproval from one to another, can be translated into propositional content.[24] Such a claim purports to close or eliminate the conceptual distance between rational locution and mere emotive utterances of which most animals are capable. Frederick Schauer, for instance, argues that in a political and legal context, where we are

[21] The Thomistic account notably opposes Descartes's treatment of animal speech as wholly unintelligent: "It has never yet been observed that any brute animal reached the stage of using real speech, that is to say, of indicating by word or sign something pertaining to pure thought and not to natural impulse. Such speech is the only certain sign of thought hidden in a body. All men use it, however stupid and insane they may be, and though they may lack tongue and organs of voice; but no animals do. Consequently it can be taken as a real specific difference between men and dumb animals" (Descartes, "Animals Are Machines (Letter to Henry More, Feb. 5, 1649)," in *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, trans. and ed. Anthony Kenny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1649/1970).

[22] For Langer, the distinction between sign and symbol usage is a fundamental break in kind, not a distinction of gradual difference.

[23] Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Politics*, 17.

[24] How we should interpret the propositional content of animal signals is disputed. See, e.g., Don Fallis and Peter Lewis, "Animal Deception and the Content of Signals," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 87 (2021): 114–124, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0039368121000352.

motivated to determine issues of free speech coverage, even unintelligible noises can be translated into propositional form:

> Does the Free Speech Principle cover those communications in which the speaker says nothing except that he feels positively or negatively about something? For example, when a person utters a four letter word at another, or screams an unintelligible noise at a speaker to voice disapproval, or cries at a public gathering, are these free speech cases? When a member of an audience shouts "Hear! Hear!" or "Rubbish!," something is being communicated, but it is little more than emotion. This communication, although not explicitly propositional, is still susceptible of interpretation in propositional form. The speaker is asserting a proposition about his own feelings, a statement of approval or disapproval that may be especially relevant in this context. The utterances become important in the context of a comment on some activity, or on some other proposition.[25]

On the strong interpretation of Schauer's suggestion, communication of an emotional state may be considered as proxy or representational of propositional speech, since even utterance of a four-letter word is "still susceptible of interpretation in propositional form." Perhaps, then, *vox* and *loquutio* are not fundamentally different types of communication, as my interpretation of Aquinas has claimed. The propositional content of *loquutio* is merely one variant on the content of *vox*. They are interchangeable, and one can be considered the more extended or more curtailed translation of the other.[26]

Is this view, that *vox* and *loquutio* are ultimately coextensive, plausible? It often seems the case that utterance of an expletive is done precisely because the speaker cannot or does not wish to offer a proposition about their feelings.[27] It also is the case that the expletive uttered seems to have expressive content – for instance, a simple intention to harm or cause offense – that inherently resists translation into propositional form.[28] The

[25] Frederick Schauer, *Free Speech: A Philosophical Enquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 104.

[26] A kind of inverse emotivism seems to be implied here. Philosophical emotivism argues that there are no moral claims with propositional content. Schauer's argument is that there are no utterances that cannot be translated or interpreted into propositional form.

[27] Instrumental music is an excellent example of expressive content that resists interchangeable translation into propositional form. Even Mendelssohn's "lieder ohne wörte," which suggests language in a nonlinguistic expressive form, or explicitly programmatic music (e.g. "Fingal's Cave") is presented in a way that inherently resists such translation. Music, like many other artistic forms of expression, can, however, be sublime as a form of *vox* that also *prompts loquutio*. The same seems to go for birdsong, wolf howls, and whale echoes.

[28] Geoffrey Pullum, "Slurs and Obscenities: Lexicography, Semantics, and Philosophy," in *Bad Words: Philosophical Perspectives on Slurs*, ed. David Sosa (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 168–192.

effect and the value of an unintelligible noise *might* include something propositional, as "Rubbish!" may be shorthand for "What you say is rubbish – is false," but shouting "Rubbish!" contains an intentional meaning beyond that proposition. It may include an imperative – where shouting "Rubbish!" also conveys a desire to shut up the speaker. The complexity of *vox*, the varied range of what may be intentionally communicated or not within non-propositional contexts, suggests foreclosure of the possibility that *vox* and *loquutio* are simply interchangeable forms of the same propositional content.

3 Truth in Speech

3.1 *The Relation of Truth to* Loquutio *versus* Vox

In light of the foregoing, it is doubtful that the perceived susceptibility of interpretation in propositional form should be the standard by which we should judge conduct to be included under a free speech principle. The shifting subjectivity of this susceptibility, and the complexity of human *vox*, entails a radically over-broad account: not only because mere vocalization is frequently irreducible to propositional content, but also because Aquinas's analysis implies that *loquutio* is subject to requirements unique to rational speech. One of these principles, which I will take to be central to his account, concerns the role of truth, or Truth in Speech. Let me clarify the role of truth for the Thomistic account. We cannot claim that rational speech alone is *subject* to being called true or false, since some instances of animal *vox* likewise can be said to be true or false: For instance, a bee signaling the location of resources might do so well (truly) or badly (falsely). Many cases of animal *vox* appear to be such that they could not possibly be false: as when mice pups "sing" to their mothers to signal their whereabouts (such communication can be no more false than my stating "I am here," wherever it is that I am). Animal mimicry is frequently cited as a paradigm case in which animal communication *intends* to deceive.[29] A variant of animal lying therefore seems possible. If Truth in Speech is meant to serve as a principle that distinguishes *loquutio* from *vox*, then it cannot mean simply *that a communication is either true or false*, since both

[29] Controversy abounds, though, on whether mimicry actually constitutes deception, as calling it so depends on the meaning of a signal. These accounts largely agree, however, that animal signals can be reformulated into propositions (Don Fallis and Peter Lewis, "Animal Deception and the Content of Signals," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 87 (2021): 114–124, www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0039368121000352).

vox and *loquutio* (construed minimally as symbolic speech in Langer's sense) could be subject to simple tests for truth or falsity. So Truth in Speech cannot involve the thesis that human speech uniquely is subject to tests of truth.

In order to sustain a fundamental distinction in kind between non-rational and rational communicative forms, Aquinas's principle concerning truth must uniquely apply to the rational propensity to advance a disputed question, prompt a discussion, or move an assembly to discourse. Only for the human being does a false proposition pose an opportunity, depending on our motivations, for pursuing the kind of discourse aimed at the truth of the matter, rather than, say, coming to blows. Regard for truth, the principle defined by Truth in Speech, does not so much require that every proposition we utter is true as prompt us to discursively explore whether it is or not.

If Aquinas's account of *loquutio* is uniquely related to truth, therefore, it cannot be with regards to propositional content itself, or the content of what is uttered or expressed even non-propositionally. My proposal is that discourse, or at least the possibility of discourse, must be central to his account of what makes speech rational. Minimally, Aquinas's truth principle requires us to hold *some* concern for the truth of what we say or express, regardless of whether or not it *is* (or is judged to be) true or false. The test for the existence of this concern is *discourse*. If I shout "Fire!" in a crowded theater, I am making a claim based on sense perception, whose truth or falsity can be tested by discourse by other sense perceivers; such discourse can constitute, minimally, a question or sequence of questions. ("Where is the fire?" "Who or what is on fire?")[30] This is an example of *vox* not being convertible with *loquutio*, but rather prompting *loquutio*.

3.2 Loquutio *as Discourse*

On my interpretation, it is impossible that discourse itself could constitute lying, even if the discourse is prompted by a locutionary act that constitutes lying. And yet the propensity that human language uniquely possesses toward discourse is essentially an orientation to truth. To some extent, this interpretation situates *loquutio* in curious proximity with Milton's defense of reasonable argument in *Areopagitica* (1644) or John Stuart Mill's account of speech in *On Liberty* (1859). Consider Milton's famous declaration – "Let [truth] and

[30] The prompting of *loquutio* by *vox* in this case would of course be limited, as the discursive condition crucial for *loquutio* is likely hampered by the inevitable panic that this word will cause, whether it is grounded in truth or not. Such a situation raises other problems regarding group assembly and its relationship (conducive or not) to discourse.

falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter?"[31] – or Mill's Socratic emphasis on the *discursive value* of falsehood, as sometimes necessarily prompting progress on a disputed question.[32] Aquinas's own methodology, the scholastic *quaestiones disputatae*, upholds a false proposition as the starting point of reasonable inquiry, and therefore serves as a kind of constituent – logical, temporal, or otherwise – of truth-seeking discourse itself.[33]

This sets Thomistic discourse apart from conversation generally. Comprehending human speech as discursive – specified by logo-centric speech, communication that assumes the principles of reason – necessarily implies that discourse has a specific point: consensus. Human discourse is recognizable as such precisely because it has this point, and because it is a point recognized by all participants. Consensus about the claim or claims being discussed is social agreement about what we call "truth." We need not think that the consensus reached is, in fact, the truth about the matter. But the fact that we continue to argue about it confirms that we care about the *possibility* of consensus, as the essential aim that shapes discourse.

[31] John Milton, *Areopagitica, with a Commentary by Sir Richard C. Jebb and with Supplementary Material* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1918), https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/jebb-areopagitica-1644-jebb-ed.

[32] Mill writes: "The Socratic dialectics, so magnificently exemplified in the dialogues of Plato, were . . . essentially a negative discussion of the great questions of philosophy and life, directed with consummate skill to the purpose of convincing any one who had merely adopted the commonplaces of received opinion, that he did not understand the subject . . . The school disputations of the middle ages had a somewhat similar object. They were intended to make sure that the pupil understood his own opinion, and (by necessary correlation) the opinion opposed to it, and could enforce the grounds of the one and confute those of the other." John Mill, *On Liberty* (Peterborough: Broadview Press 1999), 88–89. Mill's endorsement of the scholastic disputation is qualified, however, in his reservation that "the premises appealed to were taken from authority, not from reason" (*On Liberty*, 89).

[33] Stewart Clem argues that the badness of a lie resides not only in its intentional contradiction of the truth, but in a further intention specifically to harm or offend another (Clem, *Lying and Truthfulness: A Thomistic Perspective* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023]). A Socratic conception of discourse, even if it includes instances in which the truth is contradicted, cannot include harm or offense as a matter of custom – thus Mill himself is not an absolutist about expression, however absolutist he is about reasonable discourse. Clem's interpretation of Aquinas supports an absolutist reading of discourse while denying freedom of all expression, especially lies that are described as "slander" and "perjury": "Rather than analyzing all lies through the lens of the Decalogue, Aquinas proposed that we think of the act of lying *per se* as a sin against the virtue of truthfulness. His definition of the lie – *locutio contra mentem*, 'to speak against one's mind' – remains thoroughly Augustinian, but a lie does not rise to the level of violating the eighth commandment unless there is another element present in our moral analysis, namely, an explicit intention to harm or offend someone. When this intention is added to the falsehood, we utilize a more specific moral vocabulary: We call such actions gossip, slander, perjury, and so on. They belong with other sins of speech that violate the order of justice and charity. Lies that lack this intention cannot properly be said to violate God's law" (Clem, *Lying and Truthfulness*, 9).

Paula Marantz Cohen's compelling depiction of conversation in *Talking Cure* (2023) shows, however, that it is possible to have a linguistic exchange that has no point at all: simply a sharing of ideas or experiences, where mere participation is itself the point. Cohen's view is that the best conversations are like gift exchange, involving "gifts of insight, feeling, and opinion between or among individuals, noncommodifiable but precious in being reciprocal. If carried on over time, they become an ineffable part of ourselves."[34] Nothing is lost to the essential point of the activity if, at the end, nothing even resembling a social consensus, let alone agreement on the truth of the matter, has been reached. Cohen's vision of ideal human conversation seems consonant with the propensity of Socratic discourse to culminate only in *aporia* – the conversational impasse we may find ourselves in when talk leads nowhere. On the other hand, the concept of the aporetic seems to have a place only within the paradigmatic framework of *discursive* conversation: It is a special peculiarity to us that, sometimes, nothing more can be expected besides the conversation itself. Where reasonable discourse is concerned, aporia may be tolerated, but logical contradiction inevitably represents a kind of failure. This is because, unlike pleasant dinner conversation, discourse is essentially driven and informed by a specific pattern of questioning, to which the responses fall within an expected range: They cannot be so plural so as to allow logical contradiction.

The role of query, the character and impetus of one's pattern of questioning, is in fact central to an account of reasonable discourse as fundamentally distinguishable from animal vocalization. Discourse cannot be compelled; it allows for moments in which we need not offer a statement at all – a belief, an opinion, an assertion – for the advancement of productive discussion. It seems crucial that a plausible account of rational discourse should not be restricted to the standard approach to human language as assertoric and declarative: the uttering of statements that are either true or false, or an exchange of such utterances. Thomistic *loquutio*, as dependent on the principle Truth in Speech, is necessarily committed to the role of query, a topic largely ignored by the contemporary debate about what constitutes and is covered by free speech. Paul Grice half-jokingly proposes a new kind of speech act that he calls "the operator of *quessertion*" in which the speaker does not so much make an assertion as offer the possibility that an assertion could be made.[35] And yet *quessertion*,

[34] Paula Marantz Cohen, *Talking Cure* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023), 17.
[35] Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 297.

or even straightforward query, is a form of real discourse: Arguably, it is precisely query that allows us to be more thoughtful and discursive in our intellectual explorations of truth. It is query, or *quessertion*, that allows us to propose without commitment. Such "non-committal" speech, it turns out, is essential to successful discourse, and its propensity to lead us eventually to the truth of the matter.

3.3 Loquutio *in Comparison with Angelic Communication*

Aquinas's reflection on angelic communication offers another illuminating dimension to our account of *loquutio*. Such a contribution may seem unexpected, or even inappropriate within the political context of free speech. Yet for Aquinas, the relation of human beings to spiritual substances is arguably as metaphysically important as his philosophical anthropology with relation to other animals. In qu. 54 of the Prima Pars of the *Summa*, Aquinas quotes Gregory: "man senses in common with the brutes and understands with the angels." The dual relationships to animals and angels are not symmetrical, however: It would be inaccurate to claim that we are a step above animals on the ladder of the living, and a step below angelic beings. We *are* animals – this is a claim of natural science that incontrovertibly informs what we are, and the kind of thing we are. But we are *not* angels or purely intellectual beings. For one, we are different from incorporeal beings in that our bodies essentially define the way we communicate. Thus, in qu. 107, Aquinas remarks, "External speech, made by the voice, is a necessity for us on account of the obstacle of the body."[36] Human speech, *loquutio*, necessarily negotiates with *vox*, as seen in Aquinas's Commentary on Aristotle's *Politics*. They are irreducible one to another, as the intellect and sensitive appetite (or mind and body) are irreducible one to another. Contra Descartes, however, the human mind functionally depends on the body – hence, Aquinas describes the body as an "obstacle."[37]

Corporeality itself is a metaphysical category for Aquinas, which situates human beings squarely within not only animal life but also material reality.

[36] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 107, art. 1 ad 2.

[37] Much more can be said to qualify this relationship. The intellect depends on the body to an extent for understanding, since the latter requires sensory forms acquired from bodily perception and experience, then abstracted by the mind and accepted by the memory. However, following Aristotle, another part of the intellect is not so dependent: It is subsistent because an aspect of understanding is wholly spiritual and requires no dependence on a corporeal organ for its realization (once forms have been properly abstracted from their sensory matter).

Thus in qu. 51, art. 3 (in his *sed contra*) he writes: "Some functions of living subjects have something in common with other operations; just as speech, which is the function of a living creature, agrees with other sounds of inanimate things, insofar as it is sound; and walking agrees with other movements, insofar as it is movement."[38] In this passage, the speech indicated is *loquutio*[39] in comparison with *sonis* (sound). Aquinas indicates the broader genus to which human speech belongs – corporeality – while also noting the special distinction of human speech, exercised truly only by those with the specific faculty. Spiritual substances, angels, possess no such power, as they lack corporeal bodies.[40] Comparison between an angel's attempt to speak (through an assumed body) and the *sonis* of inanimate, corporeal things entails an asymmetric picture on which *loquutio* is apparently metaphysically closer to the latter than the former. A leaf cartwheeling across the path is mobilized by the wind and is *not* walking or performing gymnastics; a bow drawn across the strings of a cello may emit sounds similar to the human voice, but it does not constitute speech. All the same, the corporeality of instrumental music provides the basis for rational speech, or lyric. The rational communication of angels needs no such basis.

What interests us about Aquinas's treatment of angelic communication, then, is its emphasis on an intellectual purpose that human beings might share within our own form of discourse. Consider his insight in qu. 107, art. 3 ad 1: "Speech is not always for the purpose of making something known to another; but is sometimes finally ordered to the purpose of manifesting something to the speaker himself." We might imagine Speaker 1 uttering something to Speaker 2, who already knows what Speaker 1 has to say. He learns nothing new from the utterance of Speaker 1. What is the purpose of this kind of speech? Perhaps it is for the sake of clarification, which benefits at least the speaker himself when he utters it. Alternatively, we may state a claim aloud, in the presence of another, when we ourselves are unsure of its

[38] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 51, art. 3. The original text is as follows: Respondeo dicendum quod quaedam opera viventium habent aliquid commune cum aliis operibus, ut locutio, quae est opus viventis, convenit cum aliis sonis inanimatorum, in quantum est sonus; et progressio cum aliis motibus, inquantum est motus. Quantum ergo ad id quod est commune utrisque operibus, possunt opera vitae fieri ab angelis per corpora assumpta. Non autem quantum ad id quod est proprium viventium.

[39] Here, Aquinas employs the alternative (interchangeable) Latin form "locutio."

[40] The passage in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 51, art. 3 *sed contra* continues: "Vital functions can be performed in assumed bodies by the angels, as to that which is common in such operations; but not as to that which is special to living subjects; because, according to the Philosopher (*De Somn. et Vig. i*), *that which has the faculty has the action*. Hence nothing can have a function of life except what has life, which is the potential principle of such action."

truth or falsity. Perhaps we are not sure about how to formulate a question precisely. Someone might repeat a claim over and over again, in the presence of another or only to himself, hoping to mine further depths of meaning in the words repeated. Such speech might be declarative and propositional without being informative or illuminating to another.

Another possibility is to interpret the above in the context of Aquinas's example of angelic communication with God. In the same question and article, ad 2, he speculates that the angels speak to God "by consulting Him about what ought to be done whenever they have to perform any new work, concerning which they desire enlightenment."[41] Since there is nothing that God does not know, angelic communication to Him about some "new work" cannot be revelatory to Him; rather it is *consultatory*. Such communication is either, possibly, in the form of a question, or declarative with a questioning tone, as when someone says with uncertainty, "I suppose I should leave now." There is nothing necessarily unique to angels in this form of expression, but on the other hand, it seems implausible that it should apply to non-rational animals. To speak to another without informing or revealing something new, or to express a thought with a request in one's tone (or for intellectual substances, some spiritual mode of suggestion) or solicitation for advice, is a communicative power uniquely possessed by rational creatures, a class of being that includes both humans and angels. However such communication figures in the purely spiritual lives of angels is the purview of speculative theology. For human beings, such communication seems undeniably significant to what we consider to be effective discourse: *loquutio* that is productive of truth.

4 Conclusion: The Limits of Authenticity

I have presented an account of human speech, based on an interpretation of Aquinas's thought, that affirms certain strands in modern political thought about free speech: both a commitment to expression (Authenticity Principle)

[41] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 107, art. 3 ad 2, trans. Laurence Shapcote (Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine). The original text is as follows: Ad primum ergo dicendum quod locutio non semper est ad manifestandum alteri; sed quandoque ad hoc ordinatur finaliter, ut loquenti aliquid manifestetur; sicut cum discipulus quaerit aliquid a magistro. Ad secundum dicendum quod locutione qua angeli loquuntur Deo laudantes ipsum et admirantes, semper angeli Deo loquuntur. Sed locutione qua eius sapientiam consulunt super agendis, tunc ei loquuntur, quando aliquod novum per eos agendum occurrit, super quo desiderant illuminari. The translated verb "consult" is "cōnsulunt" (third-person plural present active indicative). Its activity encompasses not just straightforward queries but the possibility of simply repeating what someone has revealed – the repetition serving as confirmation and "signpost" for further discourse.

and the universally indubitable sense that not *all* forms of expression can be free (No Absolutism). Aquinas's concept of *loquutio*, supported by his insights about a species of intelligent communication that might be neither revelatory nor propositional, provides grounds for taking expression seriously within the context of truth-seeking discourse and deemphasizing other forms of expression as mere *vox* – covered by due process clauses, perhaps, which examine all forms of human conduct. Human speech is special, on this account, not because it is expression but because as *loquutio*, it lends material structure to reasonable thought: This is discourse that seeks truth (Truth in Speech). I have further argued that a logical extension of this definition of *loquutio* is that it cannot in fact contradict truth, even if it is prompted by a false claim or includes such missteps. Reasonable discourse involves a process, not a single locutionary act. As such, it privileges *logos* over *pistis* (conviction). In consequence, where only *loquutio* is concerned, No Absolutism should be rejected as a political principle.

CHAPTER 11

The Thomistic Critique of Neoclassical Theism

Edward Feser

1 Introduction

Theism affirms the existence of God understood as the cause of everything other than himself and as all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good, immaterial, and a necessary being. *Classical theism* holds that, in addition, God is simple or non-composite, immutable, impassible, and eternal or timeless. This latter quartet of attributes has been especially controversial in contemporary theology and philosophy of religion. Process theists, open theists, panentheists, and others argue for rejecting one or more of them.

In recent years, the label "neoclassical theism" has been used by some writers to denote a view that rejects one or more of the attributes distinctive of classical theism, but is otherwise closer to classical theism than the views just mentioned are. For example, like classical theism, neoclassical theism in this sense affirms a substance ontology against the metaphysics underlying process theism; insists on *creatio ex nihilo*, unlike panentheism; and takes God to have more knowledge of the future than open theism allows for.

Among those who understand neoclassical theism in this way are Kevin Timpe and Ryan Mullins.[1] Their usage is novel, for in previous decades the term "neoclassical theism" was used by writers like Charles Hartshorne and Daniel Dombrowski as an alternative label for process theism.[2] My primary target in this chapter is neoclassical theism in the more recent sense. However, the aspects of this brand of neoclassical theism that I will focus on are those it has in common with process theism, so that what I have to say will apply to "neoclassical theism" in both senses of the term.

[1] Kevin Timpe, "Introduction to Neo-Classical Theism," in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, ed. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kasher (New York: Springer, 2013), 197–206; and Ryan T. Mullins, *God and Emotion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[2] Compare Charles Hartshorne, *The Zero Fallacy and Other Essays in Neoclassical Philosophy* (Chicago, IL: Open Court, 1997); and Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996).

In a separate article, I have spelled out in some detail the nature of classical theism and its differences from the rival views mentioned above.[3] That article also rebuts arguments to the effect that neoclassical theism is more in accord with divine revelation than classical theism. In yet another article, I have defended the Thomistic brand of classical theism, specifically against philosophical objections raised by neoclassical theists like Mullins.[4] The present chapter is also written from a Thomistic point of view, but plays offense rather than defense. That is to say, its emphasis is not on rebutting neoclassical criticisms of classical theism but on criticizing neoclassical theism's own conception of God.

Special attention will be devoted to neoclassical theism's rejection of impassibility, immutability, and simplicity. What I have to say will imply criticisms of the neoclassical theist's rejection of eternity as well, since the latter attribute is closely tied to the others. But fully to address the controversy over whether God is temporal or timeless would require a treatment of issues in the philosophy of time that cannot be canvassed in a chapter of this scope, so that my remarks on that topic will have to be more cursory.

2 Passibility and Mutability

To hold that God is impassible is to say that he cannot be acted upon or affected by anything outside himself. To hold that he is immutable is to say that he does not undergo any change. Contemporary discussions of these attributes sometimes distinguish between qualified versus unqualified impassibility, and strong versus weak immutability.[5] To say that God is impassible in a qualified sense entails that he cannot be acted upon against his will, but can be acted upon if he allows himself to be. To say that God is impassible in an unqualified sense entails that he cannot be acted upon at all. To say that God is immutable in a weak sense entails that his basic character and faithfulness to the promises he makes to his creatures do not change, but not that he does not change in other respects. To say that God is immutable in a strong sense entails that he does not change at all.

[3] Edward Feser, "What Is Classical Theism?" in *Classical Theism: New Essays on the Metaphysics of God*, ed. Jonathan Fuqua and Robert C. Koons (London: Routledge, 2023), 9–25.

[4] Edward Feser, "The Neo-Classical Challenge to Classical Theism," *Philosophy Compass* 17 (2022): e12863.

[5] Compare Robert J. Matz and A. Chadwick Thornhill, eds., *Divine Impassibility: Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019); and Tim Pawl, "Divine Immutability," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://iep.utm.edu/divine-immutability.

Classical theism holds that God is impassible in an unqualified sense and immutable in a strong sense.

Although related, impassibility and immutability are distinct attributes. A thing could be impassible, and thus devoid of any change originating from a source *external* to it, and yet still change from *within* and thus not be immutable. However, something that is immutable in the strong sense would also be impassible. To be sure, Brian Leftow has suggested otherwise, arguing that "an immutable God could be unchangeably sad about something outside himself, and be aware of it by being unchangeably causally dependent on its occurrence."[6] But the Thomist will respond that the reason why God is strongly immutable precludes his being passible in this way. God, the Thomist argues, is pure actuality, devoid of any potentials that might be either actualized or unactualized. Accordingly, since change entails the actualization of a potential, God cannot change. But neither, for the same reason, can he be affected by anything outside him, since that too would entail having potentials that are actualized. Hence, God could not be "causally dependent" on something outside him, "unchangeably" or otherwise. Nor, for that matter, could God be "sad," unchangeably or otherwise, since that (the Thomist would argue) would entail his having an unactualized potential.

I will come back to all of that later. For the moment, let's consider the very different view of neoclassical theists, who claim that God is passible and mutable. Some quotes will indicate the ways in which they take this to be true, and why they think it is true. Let's begin with process theology's version of neoclassical theism. Process theists claim that there is more than one "pole" in God, one that is changeless and another that changes, so that we can speak of "divine becoming" as well as divine being.[7] Hartshorne says that this becoming yields in God "accidental or generated qualities constituting, with the eternal aspect, his full reality."[8] Hence, for the process theist, God is not strongly immutable.

This follows from process theism's rejection of divine impassibility, on which there seems to be an even greater emphasis. Hartshorne insists not only that there is a changeable pole in the divine nature but that God's creatures play an essential role in generating the changes he undergoes. Indeed, though God is the creator of each individual, "there can be no possibility of an individual . . . from which he could not receive influence"

[6] Brian Leftow, "Eternity and Immutability," in *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William E. Mann (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 61.
[7] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 23.
[8] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 52.

in turn, so that he must "adapt to varying states of reality" and "is both cause and effect, of all events."[9] It can even be said that "God requires *a* world," albeit not this world in particular.[10] For this reason, even though there is necessity in one pole of the divine nature, there is also "contingency that affects God through creaturely decisions."[11]

Through "divine experience," then, God is, according to the process theist, "receptive, enriched by his creatures, perpetually transcending himself."[12] Specifically, "all feelings in the world – especially suffering feelings – are felt by God," so that he has "sympathy" for his creatures.[13] At the same time, says Hartshorne, "we may contribute to the richness of his 'happiness', the beauty of the contents of his . . . experience."[14] So great is this "divine dependence" on creatures that they are "needed for God to love in order for God to have the properties of omniscience and omnibenevolence."[15]

As I have said, "neoclassical theism" in the novel sense of that term that has entered the literature in recent years is typically distinguished from process theism. All the same, at least in its attribution of passibility and mutability to God, it is very similar to the position of process theists like Hartshorne and Dombrowski. For one thing, for the new neoclassical theists as for process theists, "God undergoes various kinds of change over time" and thus "has succession in His life."[16] This entails that "God is not purely actual" and "the rejection of immutability."[17] For another thing, as with process theism, the rejection of immutability seems driven in large part by the rejection of impassibility, for there is emphasis on the way that God undergoes change precisely "in response to His creatures."[18] God, for the neoclassical theist, "can be moved or influenced by things external to the divine nature."[19]

[9] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 39 and 60.
[10] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 64.
[11] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 22.
[12] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 44 and 51.
[13] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 26.
[14] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 55.
[15] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 27.
[16] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 26. Compare R. T. Mullins, *The End of the Timeless God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 31–32.
[17] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 27.
[18] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 26. To be sure, Mullins also links neoclassical theism's rejection of immutability to its conception of divine action. But the focus in *God and Emotion* is on the ways God is claimed to be affected by his creatures.
[19] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 28.

Consider, for example, Mullins's account of neoclassical theism's view of what he calls "God's emotional life."[20] Neoclassical theism takes God to have "emotional experiences," and, in particular, "emotional responses" to what people do and to what happens to them.[21] For instance, "God can experience suffering" as a result of these things, such that "God's happiness is disturbed by what transpires in the universe."[22] This is not merely because God knows about the bad things that happen but also because God has "empathic perceptual experience" of a "creature's emotional suffering" that "disturb[s] God's perfect bliss."[23]

Another way in which God is, for neoclassical theism, "dependent on creatures for how He feels" is that his "wrath is caused or influenced by creatures."[24] This "involves God being displeased, and thus not experiencing perfect, undisturbed happiness."[25] On the positive side, in "His union with creatures," God can "satisfy a desire of love," but "desire satisfaction quite clearly entails change from *having a desire* to *satisfying a desire*."[26] This union requires "empathy," understood as "a kind of experiential knowledge of other persons" or being "consciously aware of how another person feels, and what it is like for them to feel that way."[27] Moreover, "God's experiential knowledge grows" as he "comes to know what it is like to experience His creatures for the first time."[28] He will "grow in His experiential knowledge as history unfolds," such that "God's knowledge will change over time" and indeed "is constantly changing."[29]

Neoclassical theists of both stripes often defend their rejection of impassibility and immutability by appealing to the method of "perfect being theology" associated with Anselm. To be sure, Anselm himself was a classical theist who affirmed God's immutability, impassibility, simplicity, and eternity precisely in the name of perfect being theology. However, neoclassical theists claim that rightly understood, the perfect being theology approach leads away from rather than toward classical theism.

Hence Hartshorne, like Anselm, begins with the thesis that God is that than which no greater can be conceived.[30] But he disagrees with Anselm and other classical theists about what this implies. Classical theists, he notes, distinguish between attributes like permanence, activity, necessity,

[20] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 48.
[21] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 29.
[22] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 28.
[23] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 34.
[24] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 53.
[25] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 51.
[26] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 44–45.
[27] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 32.
[28] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 30.
[29] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 59 and 29.
[30] Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 17–18; Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 19–20.

self-sufficiency, actuality, and the like, on the one hand, and change, passivity, contingency, dependence, potentiality, and the like on the other.[31] They then judge the former list of attributes to be perfections and ascribe them to God qua greatest conceivable being, and regard the latter list of attributes to be imperfections that cannot be ascribed to God. But this, argues Hartshorne, is too simple because in some cases the items on the first list can be imperfections whereas the items on the second list can be perfections. For example, "sensitivity, responsiveness, adaptability, sympathy, and the like" can be good kinds of passivity, and "wooden inflexibility, mulish stubbornness, inadaptability, unresponsiveness" and similar kinds of impassivity can be bad.[32] But in that case, responsiveness, adaptability, and the like should be attributed to God qua greatest conceivable being, such that "God's perfection does not just allow God to change, but requires God to change."[33] Strong immutability, argues Dombrowski, only seems attributable to God if we focus on the virtue of steadfastness while ignoring other virtues that entail responsiveness.[34]

Similarly, neoclassical theism in the more recent sense holds that it is precisely "the demands of moral perfection" that entail that God can suffer from "the evils of the world."[35] Nor, argue neoclassical theists, does God's growth in knowledge as history unfolds count as an imperfection. On the contrary, "the neoclassical theist will say that her God knows more than the classical God."[36] The neoclassical theist might also argue that perfect being theology requires ascribing to God what Linda Zagzebski calls the attribute of "omnisubjectivity," which entails perfect empathetic knowledge of the first-person perspective of every conscious being.[37] And this might in turn be claimed to entail divine passibility. Moreover, says Mullins, "the neoclassical theist . . . thinks that God's power and freedom entail the ability to change in certain respects."[38]

[31] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 20.
[32] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 21.
[33] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 25. Compare Hartshorne, *A Natural Theology for Our Time*, 38–45.
[34] Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 16.
[35] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 28. [36] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 29.
[37] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 64. Compare Linda Zagzebski, "Omnisubjectivity: Why It Is a Divine Attribute," *Nova et Vetera* 14 (2016): 435–450. As Mullins notes, the plausibility of such an argument will depend on how we interpret omnisubjectivity. For example, the idea that God empathizes with "immoral, irrational, or perhaps just creepy" conscious experiences would raise obvious potential problems (*God and Emotion*, 65).
[38] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 27.

3 Perfect Being Theology versus First-Cause Theology

Paraphrasing Aristotle, Aquinas opens *On Being and Essence* with the remark that "a small error in the beginning of something is a great one at the end."[39] The great error of neoclassical theists is their rejection of impassibility, immutability, and the other divine attributes distinctive of classical theism, and the small error that led to it is their reliance on perfect being theology.

I characterize this as a *small* error because the method of perfect being theology is not per se liable to lead to the great error. After all, it did not prevent Anselm from arriving at what Thomists would regard as a sound conception of God. However, the outcome of the method crucially depends on which broader philosophical assumptions are brought to bear when applying it. Anselm's general philosophical assumptions are Platonic-Augustinian, and there is even some Aristotelian influence.[40] Aristotelianism is, of course, central to Aquinas's own philosophy, and the Platonic-Augustinian tradition had a deep influence on him as well. Both Anselm and Aquinas thus fall within what Lloyd Gerson has labeled the broad "Ur-Platonist" tradition that includes not only Platonists and neo-Platonists but also Aristotelians, the Church Fathers, Scholasticism in general, and some key thinkers in the Jewish and Muslim traditions as well.[41] Given the metaphysical assumptions characteristic of this tradition, it is natural that a perfect being would, for all Ur-Platonist thinkers, have to be simple, immutable, impassible, and eternal. For example, these attributes follow from the neo-Platonist conception of perfection in terms of unity, and the Aristotelian conception of perfection in terms of actuality.

Contemporary philosophers of religion generally do not work within the Ur-Platonist tradition, or at most accept bits and pieces of it but without commitment to a general metaphysical system like neo-Platonism, Aristotelianism, or Thomism. Hence they don't conceive of perfection primarily in terms of unity, actuality, or the like. Their tendency is instead to think of perfection largely on the model of what we admire in human beings, such as knowledge and moral virtue. A supremely perfect being is then conceived of as having the excellences human beings possess,

[39] In *Selected Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Robert P. Goodwin (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), at 33. Aristotle's version of the remark is in *On the Heavens* I,5.

[40] For a useful discussion of the influences on Anselm, see Katherin A. Rogers, *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).

[41] Lloyd P. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), ch. 1. Compare also Gerson's *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), ch. 1, though this earlier book does not use the "Ur-Platonism" label.

but to the highest possible degree and without the defects and bodily limitations with which they are associated in us. The result, as Thomists complain, is an excessively anthropomorphic conception of God.[42] It is for that reason not even truly Anselmian, let alone Thomistic. As Katherin Rogers complains of writers who borrow only superficially from Anselm:

> Often . . . these contemporary philosophers are unfamiliar with Anselm's thought, especially as it exemplifies Augustinian Neoplatonism, and hence, though there is something "Anselmian" in their method, there is little Anselmian in their content. And often their work is the poorer for it. Anselm, precisely because he is operating within a systematic world view, is able to offer well-worked out answers to the very difficult problems of perfect being theology; answers which, through being part of a system, are mutually coherent and supporting.[43]

Tethered by Anselm's broader metaphysics, reliance on the method of perfect being theology would remain a small error compared to what neoclassical theists arrive at by their own application of the method. I nevertheless characterize it as an *error* because, from a Thomistic point of view, while it is both correct and important to think of God as that than which no greater can be conceived, it is not a proper *starting point* for reflection about his existence and nature. Such reflection must begin a posteriori, by way of explanation of fundamental features of the world such as its mutability, causal structure, order, the sheer existence of things, and so on (as arguments like Aquinas's Five Ways attempt to provide). Such reasoning leads us to affirm the existence of a first principle that is not limited or dependent in the ways the explananda are (changing, requiring a cause, being put into order, being made to exist, etc.). We then deduce what else must be true of such a first principle, given that it is both the cause of the world while at the same time not being limited or dependent in the ways the world is, and we thereby derive the divine attributes.

This approach to working out the divine nature is sometimes called *first-cause theology* and is generally understood to be the main rival to perfect being theology.[44] Naturally, the Thomist's advocacy of this method over

[42] Compare Barry Miller, *A Most Unlikely God* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 1–4; and Brian Davies, *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* (London: Continuum, 2006), 203–204 and 251.

[43] Rogers, *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury*, 12–13.

[44] Compare Brian Leftow, "Concepts of God," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* (1998), www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/god-concepts-of/v-1. What Leftow calls "first-cause theology" Thomas Morris calls "creation theology" in *The Idea of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 32.

that of perfect being theology is controversial, and there is no way I can resolve here all the metaphysical and epistemological issues underlying the dispute. But it will suffice for present purposes to make the following points.

First, I would argue that several a posteriori arguments for God's existence of the kind that underlie the method of first-cause theology do in fact succeed. For example, I have elsewhere defended versions of the argument from motion, the argument from causality, and the argument from contingency.[45] Hence, for the purposes of my argument here, I needn't establish any general claim about the relative merits of perfect being theology and first-cause theology. I need suppose only that, since certain arguments for a divine first cause do indeed succeed, the implications of those arguments put constraints on what we can say about the divine nature, *whether or not* we go on to judge that perfect being theology also has something to teach us about that nature. Moreover, one could accept these arguments even if one is not already committed to God's being impassible, immutable, simple, and eternal. To be sure, the arguments, in my view, *entail* these divine attributes. The point, though, is that they do not *presuppose* them. Hence, my appeal in what follows to the implications of arguments like these does not beg the questions at issue.

Second, there are serious problems with contemporary philosophers' appeal to the method of perfect being theology even apart from those that Thomists or other classical theists might raise. As Michael Rea has noted, "perfect being theology relies heavily on intuitions, or purely rational insights, about goodness and perfection."[46] But as he goes on to say:

> A concern about implicit bias arises because philosophical intuitions, or rational insights, seem to be little more than what one might call "episodes of obviousness," episodic conscious states in which some proposition appears to be obviously or necessarily true . . . As such, they are very similar

[45] Compare Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2017). What I there call "the Aristotelian proof" is a version of the argument from motion; what I call "the Neo-Platonic proof" and "the Thomistic proof" are versions of the argument from causality; and what I call "the rationalist proof" is a version of the argument from contingency. I also defend each of Aquinas's Five Ways in *Aquinas* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), ch. 3, and in "Existential Inertia and the Five Ways," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 85 (2011): 237–267. I defend the Fifth Way, specifically, at greater length in "Between Aristotle and William Paley: Aquinas's Fifth Way," *Nova et Vetera* 11 (2013): 707–749. These two essays are reprinted in my anthology *Neo-Scholastic Essays* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2015).

[46] Michael Rea, "Analytic Theology," in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, ed. Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (2022), www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/AnalyticTheology.

> in kind, if not in degree, to less philosophically valuable cousins like hunches, ordinary opinions, or ungrounded convictions. But, as a matter of empirical fact, hunches, opinions, and ungrounded convictions are often infected by implicit (unconscious) biases.

This is especially likely if one does not have (as Anselm did) an independently and systematically worked-out general metaphysics that might serve as an objective check on the subjectivity of intuitions. Moreover, while a case can be made that widely shared intuitions have some heuristic value when investigating matters very close to everyday human experience (such as moral questions), the further removed a topic is from the world of everyday experience, the less reliable our intuitions are liable to be. And there is nothing further removed from the world of everyday experience than the ultimate cause of that world. Nor, in the case of the nature of such a cause, does there seem to be widespread agreement in intuitions in any event. For example, while some might take it to be intuitively obvious that a perfect God would suffer with us, others might find it intuitively obvious that a perfect God could not suffer at all.

The dialectical situation, then, is this. As I have argued elsewhere, neoclassical theism's philosophical and theological objections to classical theism all fail. And the positive case for neoclassical theism, insofar as it appeals to a perfect being theology grounded in intuitions, is very weak at best. So, even apart from the objections classical theism would raise against neoclassical theism, we have no good reason to abandon the former in favor of the latter, novel position. Neoclassical theism is already well softened up, as it were, even before the Thomistic heavy artillery shows up. Let's turn now to the latter.

4 Actuality and Potentiality

In the early twentieth century, a number of Thomists proposed a list of principles widely taken to be characteristic of Thomistic metaphysics. These came to be known as "the twenty-four Thomistic theses."[47] The first of the theses affirms that everything that exists is either a composite of actuality and potentiality, or is pure actuality. The second thesis affirms that actuality corresponds to perfection, and that the only thing that can limit a thing's actuality is potentiality, understood as a capacity for perfection.

[47] For the complete list and a brief explanation of its origin, see Bernard Wuellner, *Summary of Scholastic Principles* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1956), 119–124.

I cite the twenty-four theses, and the position of these two theses at the very top of the list, to indicate how central to Thomistic metaphysics and natural theology are the notions of actuality and potentiality. They are at the heart of the Thomist's grounds for affirming divine impassibility, immutability, simplicity, and eternity. Given the special influence Aquinas has had within the Catholic Church, they are also key to understanding Catholic dogma on the divine nature and the way Catholic theologians tend to approach the matter. Given that Aquinas's account of actuality and potentiality was influenced not only by Aristotle but by the Platonic-Augustinian tradition as well, these first two theses also reflect more than just the Aristotelian strand within the broad Ur-Platonist tradition.[48]

Yet despite the significance of the theory of actuality and potentiality for our topic, neoclassical critiques of classical theism like the ones I've cited often make only a cursory reference to it. When spelling out the divine nature, they will focus on models drawn from the emotional life of human beings while ignoring questions about what something would have to be like in order to be a first cause of all things other than itself. From the Thomistic point of view, this is like trying to understand the American legal system by considering a few idiosyncratic court cases while ignoring the US Constitution. It is bound to be metaphysically superficial and to miss the point.

This is not the place for a detailed exposition and defense of the theory of actuality and potentiality, and in any case, I have provided that elsewhere.[49] It will suffice for our purposes here to summarize some of the key claims, motivations, and implications of the theory.

The classic Thomistic approach to introducing the distinction between act and potency (to resort for the moment to the more traditional jargon) is by way of the problems concerning change, permanence, multiplicity, and unity introduced by the Pre-Socratic thinkers Heraclitus and Parmenides.[50] Parmenides denied the reality of change and multiplicity. Change, he held, would involve being coming from non-being or nothingness. Since nothing can arise from non-being or nothingness, Parmenides concludes that change cannot occur. Meanwhile, multiplicity would require there to be something

[48] Compare W. Norris Clarke, "The Limitation of Act by Potency in St. Thomas: Aristotelianism or Neoplatonism?" *New Scholasticism* 26 (1952): 167–194.

[49] Edward Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction* (Heusenstamm: Editiones Scholasticae, 2014), ch. 1.

[50] Compare Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Reality: A Synthesis of Thomistic Thought* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1950), ch. 5.

to differentiate one being from another. But the only thing different from being is non-being, and non-being is just nothingness. Hence, Parmenides concludes, there can be nothing to differentiate one being from another, and thus no such thing as multiplicity. Thus does Parmenides famously conclude that what exists is simply being, unchanging and undifferentiated.

Heraclitus, by contrast, holds that there is no such thing as permanence, but only endless change. To take his famous example, there is the water that makes up a river at the present moment, the water that makes it up a moment later, and so on. But there is no one abiding thing, the river, that persists through these changes. A parallel Heraclitean view concerning multiplicity would hold, for example, that there is the roundness of some particular orange, the roundness of some particular basketball, the roundness of some particular wheel, and so on. But there is no one thing, roundness as such, of which they are all instances and which therefore unifies them.

Like many other philosophers, the Thomist would reject these opposite extreme views, but what is characteristic of the Thomist position is the insistence that the distinction between act and potency is crucial to avoiding them and understanding where they go wrong. An act or actuality is a full, complete, or perfect reality of some sort. The roundness of a particular orange would be an example, insofar as mature and healthy oranges are of their nature round. A potency is a capacity for being, acting, or being acted upon in some way. For example, the matter that eventually becomes an orange initially has the potency for being an orange; an orange has the potency for crushing an insect it might hit if it falls from a tree; and it also has the potency for being crushed itself, as it is when someone uses it to make orange juice.

While potency is distinct from actuality, it is nevertheless, like actuality, a kind of being rather than a kind of non-being or nothingness. This is what Parmenides overlooks insofar as he supposes that change would entail being coming from non-being, which is indeed impossible. Change instead entails actuality coming from potency. For example, when a bit of matter becomes an orange, or a falling orange crushes an insect, or an orange is itself crushed in the process of making orange juice, the potencies described a moment ago are actualized. Because a potency is a kind of being rather than a kind of non-being, it also allows us to counter Parmenides's denial of multiplicity. One being can be differentiated from another by way of the different potencies they possess.

Although potency is a kind of being or reality distinct from actuality, it is nevertheless less fundamental than actuality, in several respects. First, a potency is always defined by reference to some kind of actuality. For

example, a bit of matter's potency to be an orange is a potency for being *actually* an orange; an orange's potency for being crushed is a potency for being *actually* crushed; and so on. Second, potencies are always grounded in an actuality of some kind. For instance, it is because it is actually solid and weighs what it does that a falling orange has the potency to crush an insect. Third, a potency can be actualized only by something already actual. For example, an orange's potency to be crushed must be actualized by some already actual motion, such as that of a hand that pushes the orange into a juicer. Fourth, since potencies are grounded in actualities, there cannot be anything that is pure potency and in no respect actual. But there could be something that is purely actual – and indeed, that is, for the Thomist, just what God is. That actuality is in these ways prior to potency is the key to understanding where Heraclitus goes wrong. For what he posits is, essentially, a world of pure potencies, which are neither grounded in any actualities nor themselves ever actualized, but simply give way to further potencies.

Now, Thomists draw a further distinction between *active potency* and *passive potency*. An active potency is a capacity to bring about an effect, and thus is often also called a *power*. A passive potency is a capacity to be affected in some way, and a passive potency is what counts as a *potentiality* in the strict sense. When Thomists say that God is pure actuality, what they mean is that God lacks all potentiality in the sense of passive potency. They not only do *not* mean that God lacks active potency or power but hold that God is supreme in active potency insofar as he can bring about any effect.[51]

The Thomist's Aristotelian hylomorphic analysis of physical substance makes crucial use of the notions of act and potency.[52] A physical substance is a composite of *substantial form* and *prime matter*, where prime matter is the pure potential to take on form and substantial form is what actualizes this potential so as to yield a particular concrete individual material thing. Form considered by itself is universal and perfect. For example, the same one form *triangularity* can be instantiated in multiple places and times, and entails having perfectly straight sides. Matter is what ties form down to a particular place and time, and accounts for imperfections such as the failure of any given material triangle to have sides that are perfectly straight. Matter qua potentiality thus *limits* form qua actuality, both insofar as it gives a particular location to what would otherwise be universal, and

[51] Compare Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 25, art. 1.
[52] Compare Feser, *Scholastic Metaphysics*, ch. 3.

insofar as it prevents perfect instantiation. In this way it illustrates the second of the twenty-four Thomistic theses, cited earlier.

Form and matter are two of the Aristotelian four causes, and the theory of act and potency is deployed also in the analysis of the other two, namely efficient cause and final cause. An active potency or power is to be distinguished from its exercise, and a passive potency or potential to be changed is to be distinguished from an actual, particular instance of change. Efficient causation involves the exercise of a power so as to actualize a passive potency or potential. A power aims or is directed toward a certain characteristic effect or range of effects, as its final cause. Finite substances, being compounds of actuality and potentiality, have a finite range of powers, and thus of effects they might bring about. Only what is pure actuality unlimited by potentiality could be unlimited in causal power.

Yet another application of the distinction between act and potency is to the Thomist distinction between the *essence* of a thing and its *existence*. The essence or nature of a thing, considered in the abstract, is a mere *potential* for being. Existence, meanwhile, is what *actualizes* that potential. Only when essence is conjoined with existence is there an actual concrete individual thing having that essence.

When fully worked out, this Thomistic system of metaphysics grounded in the theory of act and potency yields a picture of reality as exhibiting a hierarchical structure. At the bottom we have prime matter, which is the pure potential to take on form and thus, lacking any actuality, has no reality at all without substantial form. At the top with have God, who is pure actuality, devoid of potentiality. In between we have things with different degrees of act and of potency. Above the level of prime matter are physical substances of various sorts, from inorganic kinds up through the various organic kinds. Because these all have substantial forms, they have a higher degree of actuality than prime matter, which, lacking substantial form, is pure potential as yet unactualized. Below God, we have angels, conceived of as entirely incorporeal intellectual substances. Because an angel must be created by conjoining its essence and existence, it has potential in need of actualization, as God does not. But because it is incorporeal, it lacks any material substrate that might lose one substantial form and take on another, which is what happens when a physical substance is corrupted and a new one is generated in its place. Hence angels have a lower degree of potentiality or passive potency than physical substances. However, precisely because they do, they have a higher degree of active potency or power than physical substances do, because, unlike

physical substances, they do not require corporeal organs in order to act on other things.

To bring all this closer to the main concerns of this chapter, we can note also that this hierarchy also corresponds to degrees of passibility, mutability, composition, and temporality. Prime matter, because it is the pure potential to receive form, is the most passible and mutable level of the hierarchy. Lacking any particular substantial form, it can become *any* physical thing and be affected by anything. Once prime matter takes on some substantial form, however, the resulting physical substance becomes limited to changing and being affected in certain specific ways. For example, you can do things to water that you can't do to wood, and you can make things out of metal that you can't make out of air. Angelic incorporeal substances possess an even lower degree of passibility and mutability because they lack any matter that might lose one form and take on another. And at the top of the hierarchy is God who, the Thomist holds, is utterly impassible and immutable.

Physical substances are also more *complex* than incorporeal angelic substances. In each physical thing, there is a distinction between its essence and its existence, and in addition, its essence comprises form and matter. Angels, lacking matter, have a simpler essence. But there is in an angel nevertheless a distinction between its essence and its existence. There is no such distinction in God, who is thus even simpler, and indeed the simplest thing possible. The physical world, since it is the arena of both substantial change and accidental change, is temporal insofar as for the Thomist, time is just the measure of change. God, in whom there is neither substantial change nor accidental change, is strictly eternal or timeless. Angels have an intermediate kind of existence. Because they are incorporeal and cannot undergo substantial change, they are not temporal. But because they must be created and can gain and lose accidents, they are not strictly eternal. The traditional name for their mode of existence is *aeviternity*.

As I have suggested elsewhere, for the classical theist, whatever else God is, he is the ultimate reality in the *ordo essendi* or order of being, and the ultimate explanation of things in the *ordo cognoscendi* or order of discovery.[53] He is, that is to say, the apex of the hierarchy of reality just described. The main proofs of first-cause theology establish the existence of this ultimate reality and ultimate explanation, and certain facts about his nature.

What I call the Aristotelian proof begins with the reality of the actualization of potential, as is evidenced by the fact that things come into being

[53] Feser, "What Is Classical Theism?"

and change in various ways. The next step is to note that a potential can be actualized only by what is already actual, and that if what does this actualizing is itself going from potential to actual, then some further already actual thing must be causing that to happen. This entails a regress of causes, but such regresses can be either linear or hierarchical in nature, where the former sort is spread out over time and the latter sort is simultaneous. It is the latter, hierarchical sort of causal regress that is metaphysically more fundamental and what the argument is concerned with. The next step is to argue that in a hierarchical causal regress, the lower members of the series can act only insofar as they derive the power to do so from a member higher up in the series. This, it is argued, entails that the intelligibility of such a series ultimately presupposes that there is a primary member in the sense of something that imparts causal power to the other members of the series without itself deriving it from anything else, but rather having it in an intrinsic or built-in way. And this in turn entails, it is argued, that a primary cause of the actualization of potential would have to be something purely actual or devoid of potentiality. And if it is suggested that such a cause might have a *part* that was purely actual and another part that possessed potentiality, then the problem with this is that the purely actual part would in that case be the true primary cause.

What I call the neo-Platonic proof begins with the reality of composite things, and argues that whatever is composite requires a cause. As in the Aristotelian proof, this gives rise to a regress of causes in a hierarchical series, the primary member of which must be something that can cause composite things without itself requiring a cause of its own. Only what is simple or non-composite can fill the bill. What I call the Thomistic proof begins with the reality of things in which there is a real distinction between essence and existence, and argues that any such thing requires a cause that adds existence to its essence. Once again, a regress of causes in a hierarchical series results, and the primary member in this case must be something that can impart existence without itself having existence imparted to it. Only something whose essence and existence are identical can do the job. What I call the Rationalist proof is a variation on the argument from the Principle of Sufficient Reason for the existence of an absolutely necessary being.

For the Thomist, fully to understand the implications of these latter three proofs requires, as the Aristotelian proof does, reference to actuality and potentiality. For something contingent is merely *potential* until *actualized*. A composite thing too requires a cause precisely because it is merely *potential* until *actualized* by way of the combination of its parts. And something whose essence and existence are distinct is merely *potential*

unless *actualized* by having existence conjoined to its essence. A first cause that is necessary, or simple, or whose essence is identical to its existence, would, accordingly, have to be purely actual, devoid of the potentials that the things it causes need actualized. Indeed, it turns out that pure actuality, necessity, simplicity, and identity of essence with existence necessarily go together, so that the different theistic proofs just sketched converge on one and the same first cause.

5 Neoclassical Theism or That Old-Time Anthropomorphism?

Naturally, non-Thomists will not accept the entirety of this system of metaphysics and natural theology, and some may not accept any of it. The point, though, is not to establish the general Thomistic system here to the satisfaction of the skeptic. Developing and defending it is not the work of one chapter, but it is work that I and other Thomists have carried out elsewhere. The point is rather to underline the dramatic imbalance between neoclassical theist and Thomistic argumentation. Neoclassical theists' negative case against classical theism rests on objections that, as I have said, I have responded to elsewhere. But their *positive* philosophical case for their own position essentially rests on a set of contestable personal intuitions inspired by analogies with what they take to be desirable human qualities. By contrast, the Thomist's positive case rests on a rigorously worked-out general metaphysics that takes the explanatory enterprise down to first principles.

Now, as we have seen, Hartshorne, Dombrowski, Mullins, and other neoclassical theists claim that God has "feelings" that are "caused or influenced by creatures" such that he can be "disturbed" or even "experience suffering," though he can also be "enriched," "satisfy a desire," "grow in experiential knowledge," "adapt," and so on. But looked at through the lens of the Thomistic metaphysics just summarized, such claims are nonstarters – indeed, and not to put too fine a point on it, they are absurd. It simply makes no sense to attribute any of these things to that which is ultimate in the *ordo essendi* and *ordo cognoscendi*, that which stands at the apex of the hierarchy of reality.

Aquinas gives the classic Thomistic statement of the reasons.[54] The ones most closely connected to the considerations emphasized in this chapter are the following. First, to be influenced, to be disturbed or enriched, to

[54] Compare *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 9, art. 1. Aquinas gives further arguments in other places. For a detailed survey, see Michael J. Dodds, O.P., *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), ch. 2.

satisfy a desire, to suffer, and so on, all entail the actualization of some passive potency or potential. But the first cause of things, being purely actual, is devoid of such potential. Second, to change in any of the ways described would entail gaining or losing some attribute, which would entail that God is composed of substance and attributes. But being composed in this way would, as noted above, entail potentiality, which, again, a purely actual cause lacks. Third, such changes would also entail imperfection in the sense of *incompleteness*, which entails unactualized potential. But, once again, there can be no unactualized potential in God.

That God lacks potential thus entails that he is immutable, and also, in turn, impassible, since passibility would entail mutability. As I've just indicated, it also entails that he is simple or non-composite, given that being composed of parts would entail having potentiality.[55] Into the bargain, it entails that he is eternal or atemporal, given that being in time entails mutability. (However, as I indicated earlier, the task of establishing divine atemporality is complicated by the need to address issues in the philosophy of time that cannot be canvassed here.)

The problems with the neoclassical position become even more obvious when we consider more carefully the natures of what Mullins refers to as "emotions." Although common today, the term is poorly defined, and not just in the view of Thomists. As Thomas Dixon has shown, it is in fact of relatively recent vintage, and runs together phenomena that were traditionally classified as importantly different, such as appetites, passions, affections, and sentiments.[56]

Aquinas classifies love, hate, courage, fear, and the like as passions, and as such they entail *passivity* in the sense of being acted upon, and, in particular, being affected in a *physiological* way, as well as a need or incompleteness of some kind.[57] Naturally, then, since God, being fully

[55] Compare *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 3, which considers each of several kinds of parts that might be claimed to be attributable to God and explains why he cannot have them. Not all the arguments appeal to the thesis that God is pure actuality, but many of them do, either explicitly or implicitly.

[56] Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). To be sure, Mullins too recognizes that the category is modern (*The End of the Timeless God*, 59) and that the phenomena lumped together under the label "emotions" are very different (*God and Emotion*, 20). But what he does not seem to consider is that the term's looseness is precisely a reason to judge it less useful than the older, better-defined terms when investigating the divine nature (or human nature, for that matter).

[57] *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 22. For useful discussion of the different phenomena lumped together under the term "emotions," and of their physiological nature, see M. R. Bennett and P. M. S. Hacker, *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), ch. 7; and M. R. Bennett and P. M. S. Hacker, *History of Cognitive Neuroscience* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), ch. 5.

actual and devoid of potentiality, is complete, incorporeal, and impassible, he cannot intelligibly be said to have passions of any kind. A neoclassical theist might reply that God is said to love, even by classical theists. But as Aquinas points out, "love" and other words sometimes used to refer to passions are ambiguous.[58] They are also sometimes used to refer to operations of the will, which are *active* rather than passive. It is in the latter sense that God is said to love, and this involves no potentiality but only active potency. When we note such ambiguities, carefully distinguish passions from appetites and sensory appetites from the rational appetite or will, and so on, the neoclassical argument for attributing passibility and mutability to God on the grounds that he has "emotions" falls apart.

Comparable neglect of nuances afflicts neoclassical discussion of divine knowledge. For example, consider the remark from Mullins quoted above that "the neoclassical theist will say that her God knows more than the classical God," insofar as, on the neoclassical view, God continually has new experiences and these add to his stock of knowledge. This assumes that greater perfection in knowledge is a matter of *quantity* of modes of knowledge and of distinct cognitive episodes. But Thomists would reject that assumption. Aquinas holds that what human beings know only as a result of a series of perceptual experiences and a discursive reasoning process, an angelic intellect knows innately in a single intellectual act.[59] Knowledge of the first kind, though involving a greater number of acts, is *less* perfect than knowledge of the latter kind, not more, and less perfect precisely *because* it requires a greater number of acts. For Aquinas, that God does not know what he knows through a series of sensory experiences or a chain of reasoning is no more a limitation on his knowledge than the inability to sin is a limitation on his power.

Here too we have philosophical claims and arguments that neoclassical theists may not want to accept. But the point is that they are claims and arguments that neoclassical theists typically do not even *consider*, or at best address in only the most cursory way.[60] They sometimes write as if the philosophical foundations of classical theism lay primarily in intuitions or assumptions different from those of the

[58] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 82, art. 5. [59] *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 58, art. 1–4.

[60] For example, in *The End of the Timeless God*, Mullins here and there acknowledges the connection in Aquinas's philosophy between immutability, impassibility, simplicity, and eternity on the one hand and pure actuality on the other. He simply rejects the whole set of notions. But he does not address the fundamental questions of how the project of demonstrating God's existence can be carried out successfully without attributing pure actuality to him, and how these four classical theist divine attributes can be avoided once one does acknowledge God's pure actuality.

neoclassical theist.[61] Or they represent the dispute about attributes like impassibility as if it had primarily to do with considerations about whether passibility might impair an agent's rationality or peace of mind, or the implications of a moral virtue like steadfastness.[62]

But the Thomist position does not rest on intuitions, and the considerations it marshals are not psychological or ethical in character but rather of the metaphysically deepest and most general kind. From the Thomist point of view, neoclassical argumentation is conducted at too metaphysically superficial a level, and, not coincidentally, reflects too anthropomorphic a conception of God. In these respects it represents something that is not really "neo" or new at all, but rather a regression to theological errors that Western philosophy moved beyond long ago, indeed at its very beginnings. Xenophanes, like his fellow Pre-Socratics, pursued the search for the *archē* or first principle of things.[63] His key contribution was to note that if we identify this *archē* with God, then we cannot attribute to him any of the limitations characteristic of the things of which he is the explanation, including the limitations characteristic of human beings. This does not yield an impersonal deity, but it does exclude not only crudely corporeal attributes, but change. For if God could undergo change, then the true first principle of things would not be *God* but rather whatever it is that changes him.

Now, if, as neoclassical theists hold, it is most fundamentally *we* who, through our experiences and actions, change or alter God, then we not only have an anthropomorphizing of God but, in effect, a kind of deification of human beings. And in that case, "neoclassical theism" is not only not truly "neo" or new, but also not really a kind of *theism* – at least not as theism has, for well over two millennia, been understood in the mainstream Western philosophical and theological traditions.

[61] Compare Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 14, 18, 26, and 27; Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 48 and 59; Ryan T. Mullins, "Classical Theism," in *Handbook of Analytic Theology*, ed. James M. Arcadi and James T. Turner, Jr. (London: T & T Clark, 2021), 86. In *The End of the Timeless God*, Mullins insinuates that classical theism's main defense of immutability, impassibility, simplicity, and eternity rests on perfect being theology (72). Again, that is not true of Thomistic classical theism, which rests instead on first-cause theology.

[62] Mullins, *God and Emotion*, 22–25; Dombrowski, *Analytic Theism, Hartshorne, and the Concept of God*, 15–17.

[63] For a useful discussion of Xenophanes's views that makes clear their relevance to our concerns here, see Lloyd P. Gerson, *God and Greek Philosophy: Studies in the Early History of Natural Theology* (London: Routledge, 1990), 14–20.

CHAPTER 12

Divine Truthmaker Simplicity and Aquinas's Doctrine of Essential and Participated Perfections

W. Matthews Grant

A well-known contemporary objection to the doctrine of divine simplicity holds that the doctrine problematically collapses all of God's intrinsic properties into one and, even worse, implies that God himself is a property.[1] The most popular response to this objection has been to challenge the metaphysics of divine predication that the objection presupposes. According to what has come to be called "Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," the truthmaker for intrinsic divine predications of the form "God is *F*" is not God plus some metaphysical property, distinct from God, which God has or exemplifies. Rather, the truthmaker for such predications is simply God himself. Since the truthmaker for "God is *F*" is God and not any property of God, God's *F*-ness is also simply God and not some property God has. Because, then, God himself is the truthmaker for "God is good," "God is wise," "God is powerful," and so on, we can say that God *is* God's Goodness, God's Wisdom, God's Power, and so on. But, contrary to the objection, it doesn't follow that God is a property, or that all of God's properties collapse into one. For, given Divine Truthmaker Simplicity (DTS), none of the affirmations in question requires a metaphysics of divine properties in the first place.

Although DTS enjoys its share of defenders,[2] it has also been the target of a number of recent objections. These contend that DTS entails that there can be no likeness (or common predicates) between God and

[1] For a classic statement of this objection, see Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 47.

[2] Perhaps the most influential presentation of DTS can be found in Jeffrey E. Brower's "Simplicity and Aseity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105–228. For other defenders of DTS, see Alexander R. Pruss, "On Two Problems of Divine Simplicity," *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion* 1 (2008): 150–167; Timothy Pawl, "In Defense of Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Res Philosophica* 96 (2017): 63–75; and James R. Beebe, "Brower and Saenz on Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 35 (2018): 473–484.

creatures; or that it commits its defenders, despite their wishes, to a radical nominalism that dispenses with metaphysical properties even at the creaturely level; or that its account of truthmaking is ad hoc; or that it implies an implausible and explanatorily empty account of truthmaking for intrinsic essential predications; or that it cannot accommodate an order of dependence among divine predicates. In what follows, I argue that Aquinas's frequently overlooked distinction between two ways in which a perfection can be in a thing – essentially or by participation – provides resources for answering these objections to DTS. Although it will not be possible in this chapter to offer a full defense of Aquinas's doctrine concerning essential and participated perfections, seeing how the doctrine can be deployed in answering objections to DTS gives us an additional reason to take the doctrine seriously.

Section 1 considers an initial dilemma for DTS. Section 2 sets out the fundamental elements of Aquinas's doctrine concerning essential and participated perfections and explains how the doctrine helps resolve the dilemma. Section 3 considers a second dilemma for DTS and shows how Aquinas's doctrine enables a response here as well. Section 4 makes use of the doctrine to defend DTS against one final objection.

1 A First Dilemma: DTS Implies Either No Likeness (or Common Predicates) between God and Creatures or Else a Wholesale Radical Nominalism

Mahmoud Morvarid has recently argued that the proponent of DTS faces a dilemma.[3] Either he must give up on there being predicates that apply univocally (or even analogically) to both God and creatures, testifying to some likeness between them.[4] Or he must embrace a "wholesale radical nominalism" that denies that metaphysical properties are ever included as truthmakers, even for intrinsic predications about creatures. The choice is an unhappy one for proponents of DTS, since presumably all (or virtually all) of them want to affirm predicates that apply to both God and creatures, and since many of them think that metaphysical properties *do* play a role as truthmakers for at least some creaturely intrinsic predications.

To prepare Morvarid's objection, it is important to note that metaphysical properties have been posited by philosophers for a variety of reasons.

[3] Mahmoud Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," *Religious Studies* 58 (2022): 547–563.

[4] Morvarid begins by focusing on univocal predicates (548), but he thinks his objection goes through for analogical predicates as well (556–558).

One reason is to serve as truthmakers (or parts of truthmakers) for intrinsic predications of the form "*a* is *F*." Another reason is to explain the objective similarities or resemblances between concrete particulars, as, for example, when the fire truck and Ferrari resemble each other in both being red. Radical nominalists take such similarities to be primitive. As Morvarid explains the nominalist position: "red things resemble each other because they are red. Nothing deeper is required."[5] But many philosophers have thought that we would do better to explain such similarities by positing metaphysical properties, had or exemplified by the fire truck and Ferrari, that *explain* their similarity. They are both red *because* each has or exemplifies a/the red property.[6]

Now, Morvarid's objection begins by noting that these two roles played by metaphysical properties are intimately connected. Suppose, for example, that we take metaphysical properties to be (or be included in) the truthmakers for "The fire truck is red" and "The Ferrari is red." In that case, says Morvarid, it would be "entirely implausible" to take the similarity between them with respect to their redness to be a primitive unexplainable fact. If metaphysical properties serve as the truthmakers for "The fire truck is red" and "The Ferrari is red," then any account of their color similarity must involve these properties as well. The point generalizes into the following thesis:

Truthmaker-Similarity Linkage (TSL): If (i) "*F*" is a natural predicate, (ii) there is an objective similarity between *a* and *b* with respect to their both being *F*, and (iii) a property *p* constitutes, at least partly, the truthmaker for "*a* is *F*," then *p* essentially enters into the explanation of the objective similarity between *a* and *b* with respect to their both being *F*.[7]

The thesis seems plausible, at least on first reading. What are its implications for DTS?

As noted, many proponents of DTS want to hold that metaphysical properties play a truthmaking role for some intrinsic predications. For example, many would say that "Socrates is wise" is made true not just by Socrates but by Socrates's having a wisdom property or trope, what

[5] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 550.

[6] What I am calling "metaphysical properties" have been understood by contemporary philosophers in two main ways. According to a *platonic* view, a property is an abstract universal that can be exemplified simultaneously by an indefinite number of objects. According to what is often called a *trope* view, objects have, or are composed of, their own numerically distinct properties (or tropes) not shared by other objects. Unless indicated, the arguments of this chapter do not depend on which account of metaphysical properties we assume.

[7] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 551.

Aquinas would call an accident. One reason that Socrates alone cannot serve as the truthmaker is that, according to standard truthmaker theory, the existence of a truthmaker is logically sufficient for, or necessitates, the truth of whatever predications it makes true. But it is possible that Socrates exists without being wise. In other words, "—is wise" is contingently, not necessarily, predicated of Socrates. And so many proponents of DTS would acknowledge that something more is needed, that Socrates needs a metaphysical wisdom property or accident in order to make "Socrates is wise" true. And so on for other contingent intrinsic predications.[8]

Now, Socrates and God resemble each other – even if inexactly or analogously – in that the predicate "—is wise" applies to both. Given TSL, however, if "Socrates is wise" is made true at least in part by Socrates's wisdom property, then that property must also enter the explanation for the resemblance between God and Socrates in their both being wise. The proponent of DTS cannot say that Socrates's wisdom property enters the explanation by standing alongside God's wisdom property, in virtue of which they are alike in being wise. For the proponent of DTS denies that God has or is a wisdom property. Morvarid contends that the only option for the proponent of DTS is to say that the similarity between Socrates and God is to be explained in terms of a similarity between Socrates's wisdom property and God himself.[9]

Let me say, before continuing, that it is unclear to me why the similarity would need to be between God and *Socrates's wisdom property*. Why not say, instead, that the similarity is between God and *Socrates*, and that this similarity holds in virtue of God and Socrates's wisdom property? Such an answer would satisfy TSL, since the property serving as the truthmaker for "Socrates is wise" would also enter the explanation of the similarity between God and Socrates with respect to wisdom. Perhaps one might still ask *why* God and Socrates are similar with respect to being wise, given that only Socrates, and not God, has a wisdom property. But to require that the similarity be between God and Socrates's *property* would seem to court an infinite regress in explanations of the initial resemblance between

[8] Likewise, it seems that God, too, would need metaphysical properties, distinct from himself, to serve as truthmakers for contingent intrinsic predications about him. But divine simplicity rules out God's having such properties, at least if they are understood as constituents of God. Thus, some proponents of DTS maintain that all of God's contingent predications are *extrinsic*; that is, made true by God's relations or lack of relations to entities extrinsic to God. See, for instance, Brower, "Simplicity and Aseity," 117–123. For evidence that this is also Aquinas's view, see my "A Thomistic Account of Divine Simplicity," in *Contemplating Divine Simplicity: Five Views*, ed. Ross Inman (London: Bloomsbury, in press).

[9] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 552.

God and Socrates. For, if Socrates's wisdom property can explain the resemblance between God and Socrates only if that property itself resembles God, then what will we need to explain the fact that the property resembles God? Aren't we merely explaining a first resemblance (between God and Socrates) by recourse to a second resemblance (between God and Socrates's wisdom property), which second resemblance will also need explaining? And if the second doesn't need explaining, why the first? The same worry, I should think, would arise on any account that demands an explanation of the resemblance between *a* and *b*, in terms of a *property* had by *a* that *resembles* a *property* had by *b*. What, then, explains the resemblance between the two properties? More properties that resemble each other?

But to continue with Morvarid's objection, he thinks that the only option available to the proponent of DTS – that the similarity between Socrates and God be explained by the similarity between Socrates's wisdom property and God – is unrealizable because to succeed it would need to satisfy the following two conditions, which he thinks cannot both be satisfied. Letting *t* stand for Socrates's wisdom property or trope, those conditions are:

(C1): A respect must be specified relative to which God resembles *t*.

(C2): Provided that (C1) is satisfied, the similarity between God and Socrates with respect to their both being wise can be explained in terms of the similarity between God and *t* relative to the respect specified in (C1).[10]

Morvarid considers six possible respects relative to which *t* might be thought to resemble God:

(R1): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being wise*.

(R2): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being a wisdom property*.

(R3): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being a truthmaker for "something is wise."*

(R4): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being a truthmaker for a sentence of the form "x is wise," where "x" is to be replaced with a singular term* (God is a truthmaker for "God is wise" and *t* is a truthmaker for "Socrates is wise").

(R5): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being something's wisdom* (God is God's wisdom and *t* Socrates's wisdom).

(R6): God and *t* resemble each other *in their both being a concrete object*.[11]

[10] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 553.
[11] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 553.

Morvarid dismisses (R1)–(R5) for failing to satisfy condition (C1). (R1) fails because a wisdom property/trope cannot be wise. (R2) won't work because, given DTS, God is not a wisdom property. (R3)–(R5) are rejected for highly technical reasons that need not delay us. Finally, (R6) is dismissed for failing to satisfy (C2), again for reasons that need not delay us.[12]

In summary, Morvarid thinks, because there is no suitable respect in which Socrates's wisdom property resembles God, that property cannot enter an explanation of the resemblance between God and Socrates in their both being wise. But, given TSL, that property must enter such an explanation, if it is part of the truthmaker for "Socrates is wise." Thus, the proponent of DTS faces an unwelcome choice. Either he must deny that God and Socrates resemble each other (even if inexactly or analogously) in that the predicate "—is wise" applies to them both. Or, he must deny that Socrates's wisdom property is part of the truthmaker for "Socrates is wise." And, when generalized, taking the latter horn is tantamount to accepting a wholesale radical nominalism that denies the need for metaphysical properties, even for contingent intrinsic predications about creatures.

2 Essential and Participated Perfections: A Thomistic Response to the First Dilemma

Aquinas would agree that none of Morvarid's (R1)–(R6) identifies a suitable respect in which Socrates's wisdom property and God might resemble one another. He would deny, however, that (R1)–(R6) exhaust the possibilities. On the contrary, Aquinas would say that Socrates's wisdom property (or accident) is like (or resembles) God in that Socrates's wisdom property is a perfection by participation in the perfection of Wisdom that God is essentially. The *respect* in which Socrates's wisdom property and God resemble one another, then, is that they are both a/the perfection of wisdom, though perfections that exist in importantly different modes. Or if, for reasons noted in the previous section, we prefer to speak simply of Socrates (rather than *Socrates's property*) resembling God, we could say that Socrates resembles God in wisdom because he has by participation the perfection of wisdom that God is essentially.

The foregoing response makes use of Aquinas's distinction between two mutually exclusive ways in which a perfection can be in, or intrinsic to,

[12] Morvarid, "Truthmaking, Resemblance, and Divine Simplicity," 553–556.

a concrete object.[13] For a perfection to be in an object "by participation" is for the object to have the perfection without being identical to it. For a perfection to be in an object "essentially" is for there to be no real distinction between the object and perfection – that is, for the perfection and the object to be, identically, one and the same entity.[14] In order to appreciate the distinction and to see how it helps address Morvarid's and other objections to DTS, we need to outline the key elements of Aquinas's doctrine concerning essential and participated perfections.

First, within the distinction, "essential" means "by identity" or "identical to."[15] This meaning is different from another way "essential" gets used by classical authors. Classical authors, including Aquinas, often use "essential" to mean something like "by nature" or "of a thing's nature." In this sense, Aquinas would say that Socrates is essentially human; he is human by nature. But Aquinas also thinks that Socrates is human (or has the perfection of humanity) *by participation*, not by identity. So, he does *not* think that Socrates has the perfection of humanity "essentially," in the sense in which this term is contrasted to "by participation."[16] Analytic philosophers often use "essential" to refer to properties that belong to a thing necessarily (in every world in which it exists), or to predicates that are true of a thing in every world in which it exists. Such properties are *not* thought to be identical to the objects that have them. In order, then, to avoid confusion with the more commonplace meanings of "essential," I will speak of Aquinas's distinction as that between perfections in a thing "by participation" and perfections in a thing "by identity." Aquinas thinks that God is the perfection of Wisdom by identity, while Socrates has the perfection of wisdom by participation. This holds for all perfections that can be attributed to both God and creatures.[17] Since God is identical to his perfections, God is his Wisdom, Goodness, Power, and so

[13] For helpful discussion, see W. Norris Clarke's classic article "The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 26 (1952): 147–159. See also John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), especially ch. 4.

[14] See Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, trans. John P. Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: Dumb Ox Books, 1995), lib. 1, lec. 10, n. 154, and his *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Sandra Edwards (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), quod. 2, qu. 2, art. 1.

[15] See Aquinas's *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*.

[16] See Aquinas's *An Exposition of the 'On the Hebdomads' of Boethius*, trans. Janice L. Schultz and Edward A. Synan (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), ch. 2, 19.

[17] See Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 32, n. 6. All quotations from this work will be taken from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). See also Aquinas, *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 4. All quotations from this work will be taken from Saint Thomas Aquinas, *On the Power of God*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns Oates & Washburne, 1932).

on. What these perfections refer to, in God, is one and the same entity, God himself.[18]

Second, Aquinas thinks that to have a perfection by identity is to have or be in full what those things that have the perfection by participation have only a comparatively diminished share in. Thus, says Aquinas, "to participate is, as it were, 'to grasp a part'. And, therefore, when something receives in a particular way that which belongs to another in a universal way, it is said to 'participate' in that."[19] Two further implications follow. First, when a thing is a perfection by identity, the thing in question is an object of which the name signifying the perfection can be predicated. Thus, while we wouldn't say that a wisdom property is wise (what's wise is that which *has* the property), the perfection of Wisdom existing by identity with the object to which it belongs *is* wise. And, so, Socrates and God are both wise, Socrates because he *has* the perfection of wisdom by participation, and God because he *is* the perfection Wisdom by identity. The second implication is that, since for any perfection attributable to both God and creatures, God is that perfection by identity while the creature only has that perfection by participation; properly speaking, we should say that creatures are "like" God, but not God "like" creatures:

> It is more fitting to say that the creature is like God rather than the converse. For that is called *like* something which possesses a quality or form of that thing. Since, then, that which is found in God perfectly is found in other things according to a certain diminished participation, the basis on which the likeness is observed belongs to God absolutely, but not to the creature. Thus, the creature has what belongs to God and, consequently, is rightly said to be like God. But we cannot in the same way say that God has what belongs to the creature. Neither, then, can we appropriately say that God is like a creature, just as we do not say that man is like his image, although the image is rightly said to be like him.[20]

We can speak of a resemblance or likeness between God and creatures insofar as common predicates apply to both, but, properly speaking, it is the creature that is like God since, as we'll also see, a participated perfection is not only diminished in comparison to that perfection had by identity, but the former also derives from the latter.

[18] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 13, art. 2; all quotations from this work come from Saint Thomas Aquiinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 5–6; and *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 38, 60, and lib. II, cap. 8.

[19] Aquinas, *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, ch. 2, 19.

[20] Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 29, n. 5.

Third, Aquinas thinks that an object's having a perfection by participation implies composition in the object between two principles or component parts, the participated perfection, and that in virtue of which the object is distinct from the perfection. Within such a composition, Aquinas relates the perfection and the object (or the perfection and the principle in virtue of which the object is distinct from the perfection) to one another as act to potency, and understands the perfection to be received, limited, and individuated (or particularized) by the principle of potency with which it is composed.[21]

Fourth, although all participated perfections will be distinct from the objects to which they belong, there is no single ontological category that all participated perfections consist in. The participated perfection of humanity, for example, will be in Socrates as his substantial form. But the participated perfection of wisdom will be in Socrates as an accident, what contemporary philosophers would call a trope (or a property of the trope variety).[22] Aquinas thinks that Socrates also has the participated perfection of existence which, while falling outside of his nature or essence, is not an accident, but that which when composed with his essence gives us the existing material substance that Socrates is, a substance that can then be the subject of accidents.[23]

Not only do different participated perfections consist concretely in different ontological categories, but, as may be obvious, a given perfection, such as wisdom, will consist in different ontological categories when it belongs to an object by participation and when it belongs to an object by identity. Thus, the perfection of wisdom, which belongs to Socrates by participation, exists in him as an accident or property. But belonging to God by identity, Wisdom exists in him as the divine substance, God himself. In looking for respects in which Socrates resembles God in being wise, we need not, then, be looking for an entity had by each that belongs to the same ontological category. Aquinas's doctrine is more supple. It enables us to identify an intrinsic perfection in respect of which God and Socrates (or God and Socrates's wisdom property) are alike, even though this perfection is a property in Socrates but in God is God himself. That the perfection exists in these different modes, however,

[21] See Aquinas, *Quodlibetal Questions*, 3.8. For discussion, see Clarke and Wippel cited in n. 13.

[22] See Aquinas's *An Exposition of the "On the Hebdomads" of Boethius*, ch. 2.

[23] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 1 ad 3; and 1.4.2; *De ente et essentia* cap. 4 and 6, in *Aquinas: Selected Philosophical Writings*, trans. Timothy McDermott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 277–284.

is one reason why Aquinas thinks that "—is wise" and other such predicates apply to God and creatures only analogously, not univocally.[24]

Fifth, Aquinas thinks there can be only one object that has a given perfection by identity. For if objects *x* and *y* were both identical to a given perfection, there would be nothing to constitute the one object as distinct from the other.[25]

Sixth, Aquinas thinks that for any object that has a perfection by participation, there is a cause of its existing with or having that perfection. This point follows from the principle that, whatever in a thing is distinct from that thing, requires some cause of its existing in that thing.[26] Aquinas thinks it follows also from the fact that all composites require a cause[27] and, as we saw in the third point above, anything that has a perfection by participation will be composed of that perfection and that in virtue of which it is an object distinct from the perfection.

Seventh, Aquinas holds that whatever perfection belongs to a thing by participation must be efficiently caused in it by that which is the perfection by identity.[28] We can get a glimpse of the justification for this point by combining the sixth point (that participated perfections must be caused) with two further claims: that whatever perfection is found in a thing must be found in in its cause, either according to the same or a higher formality;[29] and that there cannot be an infinite regress of causes of some effect.[30] Given those assumptions, the ultimate source of any participated perfection will have to be something to which the perfection belongs by identity. Two further things follow from this seventh point. First, since that which can act as an efficient cause is a concrete object, that which is a perfection by identity is a concrete object. Second, together with the sixth point above, it follows that, for any perfection had by any object, there is one and only one thing that is that perfection by identity.[31]

[24] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 13, art. 5; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 32; *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 7.

[25] See Aquinas, *De ente et essentia* 4; *Summa contra Gentiles*, cap. 52.

[26] See Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. II, cap. 15.2.

[27] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 3, art. 7; *De Potentia*, qu. 7, art. 1.

[28] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 44, art. 1; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. II, cap. 15, n. 5; and Aquinas, *On Evil*, qu. 3, art. 2., trans. Jean Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

[29] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 2.

[30] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 2, art. 3. Strictly, speaking, what is denied is an infinite regress in a per se causal series, but Aquinas would think that is the sort of series relevant to the present discussion.

[31] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 65, art. 1 and also *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. II, cap. 15.2 and 4.

Eighth, if (a) for any perfection had by an object, there is only one thing that is that perfection by identity, and (b) whatever perfection belongs to a thing by participation must be caused in it by that which is the perfection by identity, and (c) God is by identify whatever perfections belong to him, then it follows that God is the cause in creatures of whatever perfections they have in common with God. Indeed, Aquinas thinks that God is the ultimate cause in creatures of all their perfections.[32]

Ninth, a participated perfection and that which has a perfection by participation are both *like* that perfection existing by identity. The participated perfection of wisdom is *like* the perfection existing by identity, in that both are perfections of wisdom, the former an inexact or derived likeness of the latter. And that which has the perfection by participation – say, Socrates – is *like* God who is that perfection by identity, such that we can predicate "—is wise" of both of them, according to analogous senses of the predicate. For Aquinas, God is the source of and contains, in some higher way, *all* the perfections found in creatures. But only those perfections of creatures that are not essentially tied up with creaturely limitations can be in God in such a way that the names used to designate them in creatures can be predicated of God as well: "Since it is possible to find in God every perfection of creatures, but in another and more eminent way, whatever names unqualifiedly designate a perfection without defect are predicated of God and of other things: for example, goodness, wisdom, being, and the like."[33]

Tenth, and finally, even though we rightly predicate of God the names of those perfections of creatures that do not imply anything contrary to God, there are significant limitations in the capacity of our language to reveal the unique divine reality. It is true that the reality referred to or signified (*res significata*) when we ascribe perfections to God is God himself, the divine substance. Indeed, in the order of being, the perfections common to God and creatures are first in God. In the order of knowing, however, the perfections we ascribe to God are first and best known to us as they exist in creatures. Even, then, when we ascribe perfections to God, our conceptions of them and the way we speak about them are proportioned to their participated, creaturely existence. Accordingly, our concepts of perfections fall short of what they are in God, and our language leaves us no alternative but to predicate them of God as if God had them as forms distinct from himself, in the participated mode in which they exist in

[32] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 2; *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 29.
[33] Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, lib. I, cap. 30.2. See also *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 13, art. 3 ad 1.

creatures. Because the mode of signification (*modus significandi*) of our discourse systematically misrepresents the divine perfection, Aquinas will even agree with pseudo-Dionysius that any perfection we can affirm of God we can also deny of him. We can affirm "God is wise" because the perfection of wisdom exists first in God and, indeed, exists in God by identity with God himself. But we can also deny "God is wise," in which case what we are denying is that our mode of signification accurately reflects the existence of wisdom in God.[34]

A complete defense of the foregoing points would require significantly more space. Our task is simply to appreciate how Aquinas's doctrine of essential and participated perfections enables a response to objections to DTS. Morvarid plausibly maintains that if a metaphysical property is included in the truthmaker for "*a* is *F*," then that property must also enter the explanation of the similarity between any two things of which "—is *F*" can be predicated. Accordingly, if a wisdom property is included in the truthmaker for "Socrates is wise," then that property must also enter the explanation for the similarity between God and Socrates in their both being wise. But, says Morvarid, Socrates's wisdom property cannot enter the explanation for that similarity. Therefore, the proponent of DTS must either deny that the similarity exists or embrace a wholesale nominalism, which denies that metaphysical properties serve as truthmakers, even for contingent intrinsic predications, such as "Socrates is wise."

Assuming Aquinas's teaching concerning perfections, however, we can see that Morvarid is mistaken to think that Socrates's wisdom property cannot enter the explanation for the similarity between God and Socrates. Morvarid thinks Socrates's property cannot enter this explanation because he thinks there is no suitable respect in which Socrates's property and God are alike. But given Aquinas's doctrine, there *is* a suitable respect. God is Wisdom itself, the perfection of wisdom existing by identity. Socrates's wisdom property is a perfection of wisdom by participation. The latter is like the former in that they are both perfections of wisdom. Moreover, Socrates is like God in that "—is wise" can be predicated of both of them,

[34] For the foregoing, see Aquinas *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 13, aa. 3–6; *Summa contra Gentiles*, Ia qu. 30; *De Potentia*, qu. 7, aa. 5–6. For a detailed study of these and related points, see Gregory P. Rocca, O.P., *Speaking the Incomprehensible God* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2004). That the perfections we attribute to God are conceived as they are known in creatures also explains why the terms for these perfections that we predicate of God are not synonymous, even though they refer to the same thing in reality. They are not synonymous because their meaning is taken not from that to which they refer (God) but from our diverse intellectual conceptions of them, which arise from and reflect their diverse existence in creatures.

in virtue of Socrates having a wisdom property (the perfection of wisdom by participation) and God's being the perfection Wisdom by identity.

To say that God is the perfection of Wisdom by identity is not to say that God is a property: Perfections do not always consist in properties. Nor does affirming that the perfection of wisdom is intrinsic to God and Socrates commit us to "wisdom's" referring to an entity of the same ontological category in both. The fact that the perfection of wisdom (and so on for other perfections) can exist in an object in these two mutually exclusive ways allows us to say that it exists in Socrates as a property and in God as the divine substance. And because it exists in these diverse modes, God himself (the divine substance) can serve as the truthmaker for "God is wise" while Socrates's wisdom property can be included in the truthmaker for "Socrates is wise."

3 A Second Dilemma: DTS Implies Either an Ad Hoc or Else an Implausible and Explanatorily Empty Account of Truthmaking

A second recent objection to DTS comes from Dean Da Vee, though I will supplement Da Vee's objection with a complementary argument from Noël Saenz.[35] It is, of course, a central claim of DTS that God is the truthmaker for all intrinsic essential predications about him, where "essential" here means true of God in every possible world. But, as Saenz notes, proponents of DTS such as Brower often maintain that what holds for predications about God holds in general, namely that *any* object can serve as truthmaker for intrinsic essential predications about that object. Saenz calls this principle "Essential":

Essential: For any concrete x, if <p> is an intrinsic essential predication of x, then x makes <p> true.[36]

Now, according to Da Vee, a proponent of DTS *must* affirm Essential lest he be accused of making an ad hoc exception in the case of God. In other words, were the proponent of DTS to say, without any good explanation for the exception, that metaphysical properties are needed as truthmakers for intrinsic essential predications about creatures, but not for intrinsic

[35] Dean Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 90 (2021): 43–60; Noël B. Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 31 (2014): 460–474; Noël B. Saenz, "Still against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," *Faith and Philosophy* 38 (2021): 359–374.

[36] Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 463.

essential predications about God, "such a move . . . would be unacceptably ad hoc."[37] Unfortunately, says Da Vee, Essential is implausible. Thus, the proponents of DTS face a dilemma. If they deny Essential, then their account of truthmaking is ad hoc. If they affirm Essential, then they are committed to an implausible truthmaking principle. Either way, their account is implausible.

Why does Da Vee think Essential implausible? To see why, he asks us to consider cases in which different essential predications of an object are causally explained by different causes. To use his example, suppose we have a statue (I'll call it "Marble Socrates") that is essentially Socrates-shaped and essentially made of marble. And suppose the one who commissioned the statue gave John the decision of which philosopher the statue would depict and Sarah the decision of what the statue was to be made of. John's decision causally explains the truth that "Marble Socrates is Socrates-shaped" but not the truth that "Marble Socrates is made of marble." But, says Da Vee, this obvious point cannot be maintained unless John's decision is causally related to the truthmaker for the first of these predications in a *different way* than it is causally related to the truthmaker for the second. The problem for Essential, in allowing that Marble Socrates could be the truthmaker for both of these essential intrinsic predications, is that John's decision would be causally related *in the same way* to the single truthmaker (Marble Socrates) for both predications. And that, claims Da Vee, is incompatible with the obvious point that his decision causally explains one of the truths but not the other.[38] In short, Da Vee attempts a *reductio ad absurdum* of Essential's claim that Marble Socrates and other objects can serve as the truthmakers for all intrinsic essential predications about them.

Da Vee's objection depends on the following principle:

> The Explanatory Principle: For any propositions p and q that have truthmakers, an entity X causally explains the truth of p in a way that it does not causally explain the truth of q only if there is a difference in how X is causally related to the truthmakers for p and q.[39]

Fortunately for proponents of Essential, there is no need to accept this principle in order to acknowledge that John's decision causally explains the truth that "Marble Socrates is Socrates-shaped" but not the truth that "Marble Socrates is made of marble." For we could just as well endorse the

[37] Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," 47.
[38] Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," 50–52.
[39] Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," 50.

following, alternative principle, whose disjunctive statement of the relevant condition is more accommodating and at least as plausible:

The Explanatory Principle*: For any propositions *p* and *q* that have a truthmaker or truthmakers, an entity X causally explains the truth of *p* in a way that it does not causally explain the truth of *q* only if either (a) there is a difference in how X is causally related to the truthmakers for *p* and *q*, or (b) X is causally related to the single truthmaker for *p* and *q* in such a way that X accounts for why the thing can serve as a truthmaker for *p* but not for why it can serve as the truthmaker for *q*.

John's decision accounts for Marble Socrates being Socrates-shaped and thus why Marble Socrates can serve as the truthmaker for "Marble Socrates is Socrates-shaped." Given condition (b), John's decision thereby satisfies the necessary condition to causally explain this truth. But John's decision does not satisfy the necessary condition to causally explain the truth that "Marble Socrates is made of marble." For his decision does not account for Marble Socrates being made of marble, and so does not account for why the statue can serve as the truthmaker for *that* truth. John's decision, then, has one and the same relation to the single *truthmaker* for these different truths (Marble Socrates), but has different causal relations to those truths, in virtue of accounting for why Marble Socrates can serve as the truthmaker for one of them, but not the other. Da Vee may be right that there is a relationship between entities that causally explain truths and the truthmakers for those truths. But he offers no compelling reason to accept the overly narrow specification of that relationship (The Explanatory Principle) that would call into question the plausibility of Essential.

Perhaps, though, there is a different reason to think Essential implausible. Saenz maintains that truthmakers are explanatory in nature. "If *x* makes 'p' true, then *x* (or *x*'s existence) metaphysically explains *why* 'p' is true."[40] But, Saenz argues, objects do not explain the intrinsic essential predications about them:

> Take an intrinsic essential predication of Plato, "Plato is a human" and ask "what makes this proposition true?" Notice that the answer cannot be Plato. Why? Because saying that this proposition is true in virtue of Plato or that Plato makes it true, and therefore explains why it is true that he is human, is explanatory empty. Listing Plato as that which makes true "Plato is a human" is of no help in telling me what it is that metaphysically explains that it is true that he is a human.[41]

[40] Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 464. To maintain consistency with the rest of this chapter, I have changed the way Saenz represents predications.

[41] Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 464.

By contrast, Saenz thinks that an object's essentially having or instantiating a metaphysical property *can* serve as the truthmaker for essential intrinsic predications about the object because it *can* explain why those predications are true. If someone answers that "Plato is a human" is true because Plato instantiates the property being a human,

> I have been told not merely that Plato exists, but something about how Plato intrinsically is. And *how* Plato intrinsically is, as opposed to *whether* Plato is, metaphysically explains (and so grounds) that a proposition about how Plato intrinsically is has the property of being true.[42]

What to make of Saenz's argument?

Essential appears to be a point of disagreement among truthmaker theorists. Saenz cites those who reject it, but concedes that David Armstrong accepts it,[43] while Beebe and Da Vee cite others who endorse it as well.[44] That a number of truthmaker theorists accept Essential suggests that Saenz's demands for the *way* in which a truthmaker must explain the truth it makes true might be overly stringent, not in keeping with the use to which truthmakers are commonly put. Pawl charges Saenz with wanting truthmakers to provide an epistemic explanation that tells us *why* a predication is true, when properly understood truthmakers need provide only a metaphysical explanation such that their existence *makes* the predication true.[45] There may be a reason we call them truth*makers*, not truth*explainers*. At the same time, we might agree that there is a close connection between truthmaking and truthexplaining. Consider the following proposal. For x to make p true, it is not necessary that merely mentioning x's name conveys the answer to "why is p true?" But there will need to be something *about* x that explains why p is true. This requirement would provide a close link between truthmakers for p and explanations for why p is true, without requiring that identifying the truthmaker answers directly the *why* question. On this approach, Plato could serve as the truthmaker for "Plato is human" because Plato satisfies the following two conditions: (a) in every world in which Plato exists "Plato is human" is true *and* (b) there is something about Plato that explains why "Plato is human" is true, namely Plato's having a human nature.

[42] Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 464–465.
[43] Saenz, "Still against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 361, n. 9.
[44] Beebe, "Brower and Saenz on Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 475, n. 10; Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," 46.
[45] Pawl, "In Defense of Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 68–71.

Although I think the foregoing proposal preserves Essential while doing justice to the relationship between truthmaking and truthexplaining, I want to suggest that Aquinas's doctrine concerning perfections enables us to see that a defense of DTS *does not even depend* on our accepting Essential in the first place. In other words, contrary to Essential, a proponent of DTS could allow that the truthmakers for intrinsic essential predications about everything *but* God include metaphysical properties. Yet, contrary to Da Vee's worry, the exception for God is not ad hoc.

As Da Vee explains:

> What is ad hoc is to say that essential intrinsic predications require entities to have essential properties in some cases but not others *without there being any good explanation of why the truthmaking requirements differ*.[46]

Aquinas's doctrine enables us to see that there *is* a good explanation of why, in the case of God and creatures, the truthmaking requirements differ. For, on Aquinas's doctrine, we could say that what is needed to make an intrinsic essential predication of the form "*a* is *F*" true is that the perfection represented by *F* be, in every possible world, intrinsic to the object represented by *a*. But there are two ways in which a perfection can be intrinsic to an object, by participation and by identity. All the perfections of creatures belong to them by participation and so exist in them as entities distinct from the objects to which they belong. Suppose, to simplify discussion, that they exist in them as accidents or metaphysical properties. In that case, the truthmaker for any creaturely intrinsic predication of the form "*a* is *F*" will include the metaphysical property in which the perfection represented by *F* consists. On the other hand, all the perfections in God belong to him by identity. Thus, the truthmaker for any divine intrinsic predication of the form "God is *F*" will be God himself.

In one sense, given Aquinas's doctrine, the truthmaking requirements for essential intrinsic predications *do not* differ for God and creatures. In both cases, what enables the truthmakers to make the predications true is the necessary existence of the relevant perfection in the object in question. In another sense, the truthmaking requirements *do* differ. For, since the perfections exist in God and creatures in different ways, God himself can serve as the truthmaker for his intrinsic essential predications, while creatures need metaphysical properties to be included within the truthmakers for theirs. This latter discrepancy is not ad hoc. For, if Aquinas is right, there is an explanation of why the perfections exist in God and

[46] Da Vee, "Why Truthmaker Theory Cannot Save Divine Simplicity," 48. Emphasis added.

creatures in these different ways. Only one thing can be a given perfection by identity, and all other things that have that perfection by participation must have that perfection caused in them by that one thing. Thus, God, as the source of all creaturely perfections, must be them by identity, while creatures must have them by participation, as properties (or some such) distinct from themselves.

4 A Third Dilemma: DTS Cannot Accommodate an Order of Dependence among Divine Predicates

Saenz contends that some of God's intrinsic essential predications explain others, but that we can't make sense of these explanations if God himself is the truthmaker for all such predications. Suppose, for instance, that "God is wise" because "God is divine." Explaining the truth of the first predication in terms of the latter makes sense only if God's wisdom is distinct from God's divinity. But DTS and divine simplicity more generally deny that God's wisdom is distinct from God's divinity. So, Saenz concludes, DTS does not allow for an order of explanation among the divine predications.[47]

Aquinas will sometimes infer one divine attribute from another. He infers God's goodness from God's perfection, God's knowledge from God's immateriality, God's will from God's knowledge, and God's love from God's will.[48] The fact that one attribute or perfection can be inferred from another, however, at most shows that there is an epistemic priority of one to the other within the context of the particular argument in question. And that epistemic priority requires only that we be able to distinguish the perfections in question conceptually. It does not require that there be a real, entitative difference in what the perfections refer to.[49]

Suppose, however, that there were a real, entitative difference among God's necessary perfections.[50] In that case, at least some of God's necessary perfections would be distinct from God; that is, they would belong to God by participation, consisting in entities not identical to him. So, God would

[47] See Saenz, "Against Divine Truthmaker Simplicity," 468–472.

[48] For these examples, see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 6, aa. 1–2, qu. 14, art. 1, qu. 19, art. 1, and qu. 20, art. 1. Of course, in many cases, Aquinas gives other arguments for these same attributes.

[49] Aquinas, as we've seen, thinks that we always distinguish God's perfections conceptually, since the perfections we attribute to God are those we know first in creatures, according to distinct conceptions. See the tenth point from Section 2.

[50] Aquinas's view (and my own) is that all of God's perfections are necessary to him. The alternative is that it be possible for him to have more, or less, perfection than he has. But I include the modifier "necessary" to make clear the gravity of claiming a real distinction between God and God's perfections.

depend on entities distinct from himself for what he is necessarily. Moreover, we've seen that whatever perfections belong to a thing by participation must be caused in that thing. So, God would owe it to a cause that he had some of his necessary perfections; what God is essentially would be due to a cause.

We can make similar points in the language of properties. If intrinsic essential predications were true of God in virtue of his having metaphysical properties distinct from himself, then God would depend on things distinct from himself for his essential character. Moreover, we would be owed some explanation for why God had these properties. It won't do to answer that he has these properties necessarily, for we can ask all the more why he should have these properties necessarily, given that there is a real difference between him and these properties.

In short, insisting that God's perfections are distinct from God, or that God's intrinsic essential predications are due to God's having metaphysical properties distinct from God, makes God and God's character into something metaphysically derivative. But anything metaphysically derivative is not God. That God cannot be something derivative is, of course, the basic insight motivating the doctrine of divine simplicity in the first place.

CHAPTER 13

Philosophy for Theology in the Twenty-First Century
Charting the Border between Faith and Reason

Matthew K. Minerd

1 Introduction

At the core of the earliest controversies faced by Christianity were matters pertaining to the meeting of the "Uncreated" and the "created": The Uncreated Word, who was in the bosom of the Father, became incarnate, susceptible even to tactility and auditory sensation (1 Jn. 1:1–3). The earliest Christological controversies were but one iteration of the continuous labor of Christians to articulate the message of Christianity as a salvific undertaking by the Uncreated God on behalf of the created universe. Thus, Christ's exact "metaphysical structure" and "operational capacities" came to be articulated over the course of six ecumenical councils, and a great host of example cases could be garnered from the history of theology. However, in this chapter I will focus on just one important iteration of this theme in the history of this "border zone" between the created and the Uncreated: the question concerning the relationship between faith and reason and, hence, between philosophy and theology. I will do so from the perspective of one particular school's approach to such questions, namely the general approach that has come to be known as "Thomism." Before beginning this chapter, however, allow two remarks concerning how this term will be understood in what follows.

First, the perspective of this chapter is technically that of Thomistic *theology*. A discussion of Thomistic treatments concerning faith and reason presupposes a particular theology of faith. For Thomas and the main line of his historical disciples, no purely philosophical presentation of faith, or of its relation to reason, is possible. What is more, for this same approach, as well as for the orthodox Catholicism it presupposes, the truth of supernatural statements cannot be communicated by a kind of mere translation into propositions that would stand on their own terms, independent of

subjective capacitation by the theological virtue of faith.[1] Therefore – again from the perspective of St. Thomas and those of his followers who remain faithful to his thought – the best that a non-believer can assent to regarding such matters is a kind of externalized presentation of any *De fide* topic under consideration. The present chapter cannot defend this claim; it can only presuppose it if it wishes to exposit its subject matter in a way that coheres with the thought of the Thomistic tradition. Such is the only honest hermeneutic for reading Thomas Aquinas on these matters.

Second, in this chapter, my presentation will be thematic. This approach will lead me to focus upon Thomistic themes that are in contact with the historical disciples of Thomas Aquinas spanning the centuries from the late thirteenth century to today.[2] This will mean that: (i) my primary methodology will not be historical-textual, on the model of what current French usage refers to as "Thomasian";[3] and (ii) because of the historical specificities of the particular Thomist hermeneutic that I have chosen, my presentation will inevitably leave certain very contemporary debates in the background. However, the positive aim of this mode of presentation is to provide the reader with a full framework within which one might situate the particularities of various discussions regarding the relationship between faith and reason. The goal, therefore, is to sketch a general map, to provide a basic orientation amid a staggering arrangement of relevant topics. Any Thomism that is engaged in the debates of the twenty-first century will presuppose these basic dynamics of faith and reason, on pain of failing to be faithful to the general spirit and doctrine of Thomas's thought.

In mapping out the Thomistic terrain of faith and reason, I will start by outlining the basic contours of these two domains. This will immediately open upon the question concerning the nature of human reason "exercised on its own" and that concerning the influence exercised (or not) upon philosophy by faith and theology. Next, at the very boundary of faith and

[1] A classic contrast is between the "faith of demons," spoken of in James 2:19, and supernatural faith. See Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, qu. 14, art. 9 ad 4: "'To believe' is said *equivocally* of the faith of men and that of demons, who do not have in themselves a kind of infused light of grace as if found in the faithful." For applications to theological understanding, see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2022), 680.

[2] See Romanus Cessario and Cajetan Cuddy, *Thomas and the Thomists: The Achievement of Thomas Aquinas and His Interpreters* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017); for a detailed account of the early disciples of Thomas, see Frederick J. Roensch, *Early Thomistic School* (Dubuque, IA: The Priory Press, 1964).

[3] For observations concerning this language, see the remarks in Cajetan Cuddy, "Garrigou-Lagrange and the Renewal of Catholic Theology," in Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, 2–3.

reason, we will consider two important themes: the preambles of faith (those truths that are *de iure* knowable by natural reason but required in some way by the supernatural assent of faith) and rational credibility (supernatural truths' property of being eminently deserving of reason's own, natural assent). Then, I will map the domain of reason's intrinsic superelevation in the domain of supernatural truths, considering in brief sequence: the relationship between pre-philosophical "common sense" and faith; the role of analogy in knowing supernatural truths; and the discursive application of human reason to the constituting of theological science. Finally, I will close by providing basic outlines regarding the possibility for a Thomistic treatment of the historicity of knowledge.

2 Faith and Reason

In Thomas Aquinas, "reason" designates a particular power of being intellectual, namely the rational and discursive modality belonging to human cognizers in contrast with "pure intelligences" (i.e. angelic beings and God).[4] Moreover, in his epistemology (taken from Aristotle), there is a fundamental distinction between reasoning that seeks to articulate knowledge of reality in a way that ultimately is "adequated" to that reality (speculative truth)[5] and knowledge that seeks to order human deeds and fabrication (practical truth, whether moral or artistic).[6] Noting certain qualifications, our perspective will be that of speculative truth.[7]

[4] See *Summa Theoplogiae*, Ia qu. 79, art. 8.

[5] On the notion of truth as *adaequatio*, see Jan Aertsen, *Medieval Reflections on Truth: Adaequatio rei et intellectus* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 1984); John Wippel, "Truth in Thomas Aquinas," *Review of Metaphysics* 43:2 (December 1989): 295–326; "Truth in Thomas Aquinas, Part II," *Review of Metaphysics* 43:3 (March 1990): 543–567. For an account taken in view of the later Thomistic school, see Yves R. Simon, *Introduction to Metaphysics of Knowledge*, trans. Vukan Kuic and Richard J. Thompson (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990), 136–149.

[6] For a brief but clear discussion of the distinction between speculative and practical truth, with references to the later Thomists, see Jacques Maritain, "Appendix VII: 'Speculative' and 'Practical,'" in *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 481–489; in view of contemporary debates, with essential differences from Maritain and those who are in the same line, see Stephen L. Brock, "Realistic Practical Truth," *Doctor Communis* 12 (2008): 62–75.

[7] This choice has been made to economize space. However, it remains a very important task for contemporary Thomism. In the moral order, I have tried to sketch some elements of this in dialogue with a variety of Thomist thinkers in Matthew K. Minerd, "Introduction," *Conscience: Four Thomistic Treatments* (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2019), 1–79. In the domain of art, much work must be done, doubtlessly following in the lineage of Gilson, Maritain, and Marie-Dominique Philippe. (The author acknowledges the sad fact of the post-mortem revelations concerning deeds purportedly committed by Fr. Philippe in his old age.)

Living in the midst of a series of confrontations long underway before his own studies, Thomas repeatedly articulated a robustly Aristotelian account of human speculative reason, not without his own developments, combining elements from various works by the Stagirite (especially the latter's *De anima*, *On Sense and What Is Sensed*, *On Memory and Reminiscence*, and the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*) into a complex account of the process of human cognition that at once makes room for the embodied sense capacities of the human person, including the powers of cognition shared with the higher animal kingdom, alongside a conviction, *pace* certain strains of Aristotelianism,[8] that the human intellect is an immaterial power personally had by each human person. Thus, in its speculative operation, human cognition involves the activity of an intellect that renders actual the intelligibility that is potentially expressed in sensation-bound wholes ("phantasms") formed by various sense powers shared with lower animals: imagination, memory, and estimation.[9]

Most often, philosophical accounts of Thomas's theory of speculative cognition focus on this process of illumination and "abstraction" by the human intellect.[10] However, beyond this initial stage of cognition, he incorporates into his structurally Aristotelian theory of knowledge the Augustinian notion of the "internal word" expressed by the knower.[11] Moreover, on the basis of the epistemological foundations for Aristotle's logical corpus, he more fully elaborates three different acts (or "operations") of speculative intellection: the grasping of indivisible essences, expressed in definitions; the forming of statements and judgments; and

[8] He also held that this was the historical position of Aristotle, as is obvious in various works, though most forcefully in his polemic *De unitate intellectus contra averroistas*. Although this is no longer the consensus view of intellectual historians, the reader will likely benefit from considering the methodological difficulties faced by Aristotle in these matters as he treats a non-material capacity in the midst of the natural-philosophical discipline in his *De anima*. For an interesting, brief discussion, see Myles F. Burnyeat, *Aristotle's Divine Intellect* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University, 2008).

[9] The latter of which comes to be referred to as "cogitative" in the case of human cognition. On this topic, see the recent work (and references) in John Jalsevac, "Mitigating the Magic: The Role of Memory, the *Vis Cogitativa*, and Experience in Aquinas's Abstractionist Epistemology," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 97:3 (2023): 267–292 (esp. note 35).

[10] A standard series of texts used would be the summary found in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 84–86.

[11] A well-known study on this topic within Thomas's own texts is Bernard Lonergan, *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, ed. David Burrell (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967); for a lucid summary of the position of John of St. Thomas, see John Frederick Peifer, *The Concept in Thomism* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 132–212; for a dissenting voice holding that the notion of *verbum* is only theological, not philosophical, see John P. O'Callaghan, "*Verbum Mentis*: Philosophical or Theological Doctrine in Aquinas?" *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 103–119.

discursive reasoning.[12] The expressing of speculative truth takes place through the latter two, being expressed in the form of judgments.[13]

Such truth can be expressed either immediately and precisely based on the terms of a given proposition or mediately through syllogistic inference. In the first cases, one exercises the capacity known as "intellectus" (or, as regards moral truths, "synderesis"[14]). These are so-called *per se nota* truths, which are indemonstrably known *through themselves*, not through a syllogistic middle term.[15] Such *per se nota* truths can, however, be argued for by clarification of the terms involved and through *reductio ad absurdum* arguments.[16] Mediate knowledge of truth involves discursive rational activity,[17] the scientific form of which is sketched in Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, which served as the basis for the conception of *scientia* presupposed by Thomas and his followers.[18] Further differentiation can occur in terms of the "formal object" of various sciences, which Aquinas himself distinguishes according to the Aristotelian schema of natural philosophy, mathematics, and metaphysics,[19] though some Thomists have proposed further differentiation in view of the development of the modern physical sciences.[20]

[12] Although the texts may be found throughout Thomas's corpus, a summary can be found in his introduction to his commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. These three operations are structurally important for the study by Robert W. Schmidt, *The Domain of Logic According to Saint Thomas* Aquinas (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), 175–301.

[13] Concerning the secondary sense of term "truth" applicable to the first operation of the intellect, see Wippel, "Truth in Thomas Aquinas, Part II," 559–560; from a directly Aristotelian perspective, see Kurt Pritzl, "Being True in Aristotle's Thinking," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* 14 (1998): 177–201.

[14] Concerning the genesis of the term "synderesis," see Douglas Kries, "Origen, Plato, and Conscience ('Synderesis') in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary," *Traditio* 57 (2002): 67–83.

[15] Although one might refer to these truths as "self-evident," it is more illuminative to consider Thomas's noetic by distinguishing what is known *per se* from what is known *per aliud*, the aliud being another term through syllogistic inference.

[16] For an explanation of why a *reductio ad absurdum* argument does not involve mediate inference, see the text of John of St. Thomas cited in Matthew K. Minerd, "Wisdom Be Attentive: The Noetic Structure of Sapiential Knowledge," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18:4 (2020): 1103–1146 (here 1142n97).

[17] In later scholastic terminology, this would be, strictly speaking, *objectively illative* discursion. For texts related to this point of later scholastic logic, see the discussion and texts in Minerd, "Wisdom Be Attentive," 1126n65.

[18] For a classic disputation related to this topic, see John of St. Thomas, *Material Logic of John of St. Thomas*, trans. Yves R. Simon, John J. Glanville, and G. Donald Hollenhorst (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1955), qu. 26–27 (pp. 504–586). The role of dialectic (in the line of the *Topics*) also deserves consideration but would overly complicate our concerns here.

[19] A classical text stating this division (presupposed in many other places in Thomas) is *Super Boethius de Trinitate*, qu. 5 and 6. See Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: PIMS, 1986).

[20] This was the position of Maritain and Yves Simon, opposed by figures like the later Charles De Koninck, Benedict Ashley, and William Wallace.

In contrast to such knowledge grasped by means of the human intellect's natural capacities, there is the domain of faith. For Thomas and his school, faith is distinct from reason both in its principle and in its object.[21] The subjective[22] principle of truths known through faith is the human intellect and will elevated by supernatural grace and the light of the theological virtue of faith. According to Thomas's theology, supernatural faith is a kind of property sanctifying grace, the latter of which renders the substance of the human soul *deiform*.[23]

This deiformity points to the other aspect of faith noted earlier: It *objectively* differs from unaided human reason as well. As is well known, Thomas is a defender of "two theologies": one that pertains to philosophical metaphysics and one that is an office of believing human reason.[24] Key to this distinction is the fact that the one "reality" or "thing" (*res*) that is God can be an "object" (*obiectum*) of human knowing in many ways.[25] According to Thomas, one can consider God as a reality (*Deus ut res est*) or precisely as the object of a knower or lover (*Deus ut obiectum est*). According to him, the one reality that is God can be known – that is, can be speculatively objectified – in various ways: as First Mover (in natural philosophy), as First Cause of Being (in philosophical metaphysics), and as *Triune Deity* (by faith and the theological knowledge that follows therefrom). In this way, the knowledge had through faith is *objectively* different from that which is had through reason.[26]

[21] The language of "principle" and "object" is here coherent with the later language of the First Vatican Council's Conciliar Constitution, *Dei filius*, whose content is deeply marked by Thomism, even if it is not technically a *De fide* codification of Thomism *per se*. On this, see Cajetan Cuddy, "*Dei Filius* IV: On Faith and Reason," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 20:3 (2022): 873–890.

[22] By which is meant "that which exists in a substance-subject." The sense of subject and object in scholastic thought are quite different from the modern uses of these terms. For a brief discussion with further citations, see Matthew K. Minerd, "Thomism and the Formal Object of Logic," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 93:3 (2019): 411–444 (here 423 and 444).

[23] See *Summa Theologiae*, IaIIae qu. 110, art. 4.

[24] For a lengthy discussion of this topic, see the first section of Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht, *Thomas D'Aquin: Dieu et la Métaphysique* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 2021), 127–535; also see Thomas C. O'Brien, *Metaphysics and the Existence of God* (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2017).

[25] The distinction between "thing" and "object" in these senses tracks that between "material object" and "formal object." See the references in John C. Cahalan, "Thing and Object in Maritain," *The Thomist* 59:1 (January 1995): 21–46 (here 27); for texts from Aquinas, see Louis-Marie Régis, *Epistemology*, trans. Imelda Choquette Byrne (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 177–193; also, for further history, see Lawrence Dewan, "'*Obiectum*': Notes on the Intention of a Word," in *Wisdom, Law, and Virtue: Essays in Thomistic Ethics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 403–443.

[26] Regarding the distinction between thing and object discussed here, see the article by Cuddy cited in note 21. Note, also, that I am somewhat simplifying the distinctions within the supernatural order. This was a matter given greater precision by scholastics after Thomas's time.

Therefore, according to Thomas, the two domains of faith and reason are quite distinct from each other: in their subjective principles (natural reason vs. the intellect superelevated by faith) and in their objects (all that can be known concerning being on the basis of human experience vs. the Triune God and everything revealed by Him about Himself or about the economy of salvation). The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to various questions concerning the relations between these two orders.

3 How "Pure" Is "Pure Philosophical Reason"?

For many who read Thomas, he appears to be, and is, a thinker deeply philosophical in propensities and concerns. Nonetheless, when considering the catalog of his works, it is clear that Thomas's labors were those of a theologian.[27] Outside of commentaries on the works of Aristotle, several youthful opuscula, and certain brief texts written in response to specific requests or controversies, his writings are clearly theological.[28] The extracting of a complete philosophy from his writings, independent from theological use and context, is perhaps a worthwhile task. However, historically speaking, it was not *his* task. It is a labor of Thom*ism*, concerned with presenting an objectively articulated philosophical whole finding its ultimate basis in the texts of Thomas. However, anyone who does so will be faced with this formidable fact: The spirit guiding such labors is something *new* in relation to Thomas's own oeuvre, in which philosophy was deployed by a theologian in theological labors.[29]

No reader of Thomas can, therefore, account for the relations between faith and reason without engaging in the questions raised during the Francophone debates concerning "Christian philosophy" during the 1920s and 1930s. The question concerning the validity of the notion of a Christianized philosophy occasioned pieces from a broad array of thinkers, both Catholic and non-Catholic. For philosophers like Émile Bréhier and Léon Brunschvig, as well as for scholastics like Fr. Pierre

[27] Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Saint Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, 3rd ed., trans. Matthew K. Minerd and Robert Royal (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 383–436.

[28] For the purposes of this chapter, it will be presumed that the commentaries substantially cohere with Thomas's own thought, obviously without limiting Aquinas's thought on any philosophical topic solely to the limits of the Stagirite's own thought as exposited in the Commentaries.

[29] Indeed, from Thomas's perspective (which is that of Aristotle in general), there is no such thing as "philosophy" as a unified discipline. There are philosophical sciences, with their own subject matters and principles, variously related to each other. The philosophical principles and conclusions used by Thomas find themselves used in a different and higher enterprise: theological science.

Mandonnet and Canon Fernand Van Steenberghen (and many others), there could be no such thing as a philosophy that was objectively and intrinsically Christian. For Maurice Blondel, human reason itself must in some way be oriented toward supernatural revelation. Striking something of a balance between these positions, Étienne Gilson, Jacques Maritain, and Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange held (each in different ways) that in the current order of things, reason is subjectively influenced by faith's illumination and objectively by its content, though without holding that reason itself could posit some kind of orientation toward supernatural revelation.[30]

In a general chapter such as this, it is impossible to settle the issue based upon the texts of Aquinas. However, any sound reading of St. Thomas's own methodologies and texts must recognize that, amid his theological labors, he fashioned a philosophical synthesis that is foundationally Aristotelian, read in light of a particular neo-Platonic tradition influenced by the Arab-Proclean *Liber de Causis*, the works of *Pseudo-Dionysius*, St. Augustine, and other Patristic sources. Moreover, he clearly holds that human reason can, by its own lights, discover subjects, principles, and conclusions that are susceptible to being articulated into discourses that meet the requirements of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*.[31] Thus, appropriately rigorous philosophical *scientiae* are possible, even if he himself never provides the reader with a complete, unified treatise on any philosophical discipline *ad mentem Thomae*. Thus, for example, the contemporary Thomistic metaphysician might attempt to reconstitute a kind of philosophically independent metaphysics akin to the work of Msgr. John Wippel (numbered among those who very clearly distinguish faith and reason)[32] or, by contrast, a more theologically sensitive account, as can be found in the work of someone like Fr. Joseph Owens.[33] One could also add many Thomistic manuals, which also attempted to reconstitute a metaphysics based on Thomas's thought, though under the influence of later scholastic debates.[34] Finally, abandoning any of these sorts of

[30] For an introduction to this debate, with some texts in translation along with further references, see Gregory Sadler, *Reason Fulfilled by Revelation: The 1930s Christian Philosophy Debate in France* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

[31] The texts cited above from the *Super Boethius De Trinitate* are one among many that corroborate this fact.

[32] See John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000).

[33] See Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

[34] The cataloging of such texts would be massive, including many branches of later scholasticism and neo-scholasticism.

"reconstituted" accounts of metaphysics, one could opt to retrieve purely Thomas's thought precisely in its historical and theological lineaments, akin to the recent work of Fr. Thierry-Dominique Humbrecht.[35]

In any event, when interpreting Thomas's texts and proposing their philosophical relevance today, the serious philosopher must stake a claim amid these intricate debates. This is an *inescapable* aspect of the relationship between faith and reason in Thomism.

4 The Borders of Philosophy and Faith: Preambles and "Rational Credibility"

The next topic of relevance in the historical works of Thomas and of later Thomism is that concerning the "preambles of faith" and "rational credibility." Because of certain historical interconnections between these two topics in the writings of some twentieth-century Thomists, I will begin by remarking on the latter.

Through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western Catholic thought found itself facing a number of questions raised by the post-reformation modern world.[36] Among these issues was the concerted opposition raised against Catholicism by various philosophical currents opposed to Catholic claims regarding supernatural revelation, which, nonetheless, called for a *reasonable* obedience of faith. In view of such epistemological questions regarding the possibility of reason's own openness to suprarational faith, Western Catholic theology gradually developed a particular "treatise" of theology dedicated to the defense of the very possibility of revelation. At times given names such as *De vera religione*, *De revelatione*, or even *De ecclesia*,[37] these texts would come to be termed by some "apologetics," thereby referring to the global task of defending the possibility of revelation and the openness of the human mind to the reception thereof.[38]

[35] The entire massive volume works through such a presentation, though a methodological presentation can be found in Humbrecht, *Thomas D'Aquin: Dieu et la Métaphysique*, 102–107, 1307–1345.

[36] For a brief history of this treatise in the nineteenth century, see J. Bellamy, "La traité *De vera Religione* au dix-neuvième siècle," in *La théologie Catholique au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1904), 210–225.

[37] The case of the treatises titled *De ecclesia* warrants particular notification, for these texts had become something of a hodgepodge of treatments of revelation, elements of ecclesiology, and even the brief remnants of theological methodology more amply treated in larger treatises *De locis theologicis*. Concerning the state of these treatises at the turn of the twentieth century, see Richard Redmond, "How Should *De ecclesia* Be Treated in Scientific Theology?" *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 17 (1962): 139–160.

[38] There was significant variation even here, for some scholastics held that apologetics is a purely philosophical discipline, whereas others considered it a theological discipline, keeping in mind the

Among the topics of concern to the First Vatican Council (1870), that of faith and reason was central, thereby leading to the promulgation of the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei filius*.[39] In the third chapter of the constitution, while discussing supernatural faith itself, the Council Fathers declared:

> However, in order that the obedience of our faith be nevertheless in harmony with reason, God willed that exterior proofs of his revelation, viz., divine facts, especially miracles and prophecies, should be joined to the interior helps of the Holy Spirit; as they manifestly display the omnipotence and infinite knowledge of God, they are the most certain signs of the divine revelation, adapted to the intelligence of all men.[40]

In light of these remarks and the connected canons, a number treatises were composed through the mid-twentieth century, explaining the boundaries of such rational credibility.

The pointed anti-rationalist (and anti-fideist) concerns of modernity were not the same as the exact concerns faced by Thomas himself.[41] However, throughout his works many texts can be gathered concerning the natural, rational obedience owed by human reason to supernatural revelation. A characteristic, though far from isolated, formulation of this can be found in *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 10, art. 1 ad 1: "To have faith does not belong to human nature; however, it does belong to human nature that man's mind not be opposed to the interior impulse [of the Holy Spirit] and external preaching of the truth. Whence, unbelief is contrary to nature." A characteristic work, systematically gathering Thomas's (and Thomistic) discussions of the motives of credibility and the nature of their certitude can be found in Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's lengthy two-volume *On Divine Revelation*.[42] For a very orderly presentation, with numerous

requirements of Christian faith, though arguing solely on the basis of purely rational arguments. The latter will be the general perspective of this chapter, on the basis of the arguments marshaled throughout Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange's *On Divine Revelation* cited earlier. For the history of apologetics throughout this period, see Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2005).

[39] For a recent discussion concerning this chapter of *Dei filius*, see Gaven Kerr, "*Dei Filius* III: On Faith," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 20:3 (2022): 855–871.

[40] First Vatican Council, *Dei filius*, ch. 3 in Heinrich Denzinger et al., *Enchiridion Symbolorum: A Compendium of Creeds, Definitions and Declarations of the Catholic Faith*, ed. Peter Hünermann et al (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2021), 3009.

[41] For a somewhat dated but clear examination of this, see Étienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966); for a detailed study in the immediate context of Thomas, see John Wippel, *Medieval Reactions to the Encounter between Faith and Reason* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1995).

[42] See note 1.

historical and scholarly updates, one should consult the first volume of Fr. Emmanuel Doronzo's *Theologia dogmatica*.[43]

These works are devoted to the task of articulating the rational probative force of Christian revelation itself (and not any particular truths of faith). In view of the words of *Dei filius*, they emphasize the probative force of early Christian miracles and the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. However, aware of the difficulties caused by our historical distance from such miracles in particular, such Thomistic authors also defended the importance of the Catholic Church itself as a central motive of credibility (on this point also following indications in *Dei filius*[44]). Likewise, although they show themselves hesitant to grant too much certitude to the intrinsic demands of human reason and perfection in relation to the supernatural order, they nonetheless offer generous accounts concerning the ways that Christian revelation is rationally worthy of belief precisely by universally fulfilling the loftiest human aspirations through so sublime a teaching.[45]

Thus, such *rational* credibility is a unique property of *supernatural* revelation: the latter's eminent susceptibility to being accepted *by human reason itself*. However, Thomas himself, as well as his twentieth-century defenders, are quite clear that supernatural faith must be the product of a new work by God, subjectively illuminating the mind and objectively presenting new supernatural truths for belief-knowledge. The resolution of this relationship remains one of the most important topics concerning the very boundary line between faith and reason. It cannot be resolved except by theological discourse, though profoundly deploying philosophical reasoning, which is not opposed to such theological instrumentalization.[46]

This brings us, at last, to the "preambles of faith." The expression itself indicates particular truths that are presupposed in some way by faith: the rationally knowable truths that "walk before" faith. Thomas's various texts[47] concerning the nature and number of such preambles have been understood in various ways, which have been lucidly schematized by Fr.

[43] See Emmanuel Doronzo, *Theologia dogmatica*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America, 1966), 98–398. For a detailed history of debates surrounding the notion of rational credibility, see Ambroise Gardeil, "Crédibilité," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 3.2, ed. Alfred Vacant and Eugène Magenot (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1907), 2201–2301.

[44] See First Vatican Council, ch. 3 (Denzinger, 3013).

[45] See Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 2, 309–364; Doronzo, *Theologia dogmatica*, 213–232 and 307–327.

[46] For a lengthy speculative, textual, and historical discussion regarding the relationship between credibility and the assent of faith, see Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 1, 650–775.

[47] For an accounting of such texts, see John Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Philosophy and the Preambles of Faith," in *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas III* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 73–97.

Guy de Broglie into three general interpretive tendencies.[48] The first is the most modern and connected with the question of rational credibility. According to the exponents of this first outlook, there would be two rather brief lists of preambulatory truths of reason, the first being metaphysical (most particularly *God exists* and *God is utterly truthful*) and the second at the level of historical contingencies related to the fact of revelation. With such truths in hand, one could form for oneself a judgment concerning the rational "belief-worthiness" of the revealed message. For adherents of this position, it would be necessary that one know at least the truths connected with rational credibility needed for forming a supernatural faith-judgment that is not opposed to human reason, one that is well reasoned in its obedience to faith.

Whereas this first group ultimately cannot find strong support in the full array of St. Thomas's texts dedicated to this topic,[49] a second group of interpreters would restrict such "preambulatory" truths solely to the metaphysical order, thereby hewing much closer to the actual words of St. Thomas. The *Tractatus de revelatione* thus does not weigh as heavily on such an interpretation of the Angelic Doctor's texts, meaning that the whole "existential" problem of the "fact of revelation" is not numbered among the preambles. Granted, metaphysical truths concerning God's existence, His truthfulness, man's orientation to the truth, and so forth are all presupposed for the "judgment of credibility." Nonetheless, there are many other philosophical truths that belong to the domain of faith while also being susceptible to demonstration by reason alone. This much broader category of truths would be the preambles of faith.

This second position has the benefit of remaining closer to St. Thomas's texts.[50] However, it leaves open an important final question: To what degree must one know such natural truths in order to form a supernatural assent of faith? In other words, is it a temporal priority or, rather, only an objective-intelligible (or "logical"[51]) one? In short, when we say that the assent of supernatural faith "presupposes" given natural truths, do we interpret the word "presuppose" to mean "as a psychological presupposition in order to elicit an act of faith" or does it mean "as an

[48] Guy de Broglie, "La vraie notion Thomiste des 'praeambula fidei,'" *Gregorianum* 34:3 (1953): 341–389 (here 342–343).

[49] See De Broglie, "La vraie notion," 344–346 and 369–384.

[50] A disadvantage to a more textualist position is the ultimate hermeneutical limitation of being concerned with *solely* presenting the explicit, limited lists of metaphysically focused truths found in Thomas's own words.

[51] See Wippel, "Thomas Aquinas on Philosophy and the Preambles of Faith," 80. Wippel, therefore, without necessarily agreeing with everything in De Broglie's third category, inclines in this direction.

objective presupposition in order to constitute 'in *esse intelligibili*' those things which are held *De fide*"?[52] In other words, there are some truths that would be *objectively implied* in the supernatural truths of faith, even though this assent of faith might be the first time that one attains such truths with certitude, heretofore having been unable (for sundry reasons) to grasp them by way of an independent, philosophical demonstration. This position is well summarized in a text from Jean-Hervé Nicolas, writing after the time of De Broglie's article but well expressing the essence of this third perspective:

> In no way is [natural knowledge of God's existence] necessary [prior to the acceptance of the Word of God through faith], for that would unduly rule out the possibility of faith, not only for the mass of people who cannot (or who do not wish to) acquire such knowledge, but also for a great number of those for whom philosophy – in which they have been formed or which they have deliberately chosen – partially or totally excludes this knowledge. The truth of faith "objectively" presupposes and implies these truths, meaning that the believer holds them through the same act of faith by which he adheres to a properly supernatural mystery. In believing that God is Triune and that He has spoken to men, he believes that God exists, and in believing that baptism has made us children of God and has prepared us for eternal life, he believes that the soul is immortal . . . In order to believe, and in order to theologically reflect on his faith, it is in no way necessary for one to have philosophically demonstrated the truths that make up "natural theology." In this sense, we can admit . . . that faith is necessary in order for the believer to be perfectly certain of the natural truths that provide faith with its foundation. Nonetheless . . . "He who believes in the existence of God can be certain that his faith rests on solid bases and can be rationally justified." This indicates that the uncertainty and hesitations that more or less befall the demonstrations and affirmations of natural theology do not come from a deficiency in these affirmations' objective certitude. Rather, this comes from the conditions of the knowing subject.[53]

Ultimately, for Thomas and the Thomists mentioned here, there is some need for naturally knowable truths that can function as the instruments for expressing supernatural knowledge. The debate will concern the degree to which temporal priority must be stressed (lest one fall into fideism, denying the necessity of presupposed natural rational knowledge)

[52] See De Broglie, "La vraie notion," 387.

[53] Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Catholic Dogmatic Theology: A Synthesis*, vol. 1 (*On the Trinitarian Mystery of God*) (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 58–59. This third position is, in essence, that of the present author. See Matthew K. Minerd, "Philosophy Born of Faith: The Case of the *Praeambula Fidei*," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 96 (2022): 83–108. Several paragraphs above are taken from this address.

without claiming that every "preamble" must be known philosophically prior to the supernatural assent of faith (lest one implicitly assert that, in the end, salvation is nearly impossible for the non-erudite[54]). This leads us, however, to our next section, concerning the manner in which rational knowledge is elevated to express and articulate supernatural truths.

5 Superelevated Reason: Christian Common Sense, Super-Analogy, and Theological Science

Two important questions have been faced by Thomists regarding the supernatural elevation of rationally knowable truths: How is such knowledge related to philosophical (and theological) systems? And in what way are the notions used in such truths of faith the same as they are at the level of "mere reason," and in what way do they differ? To which a third might be added: What is the office of discursive reasoning concerning such supernatural truths?

The first question is not raised and answered in an explicit form by St. Thomas. The twentieth-century debates regarding the nature of the preambles of faith already bear witness to this ambiguity in his own corpus (even if strong arguments can indeed be marshaled for the third position discussed above). However, in the context of early twentieth-century concerns, a strong argument was marshaled, based on both Thomistic and broader doctrinal foundations (in harmony with Thomas's thought), by Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange in his *Le sens commun*, the third section of which is dedicated to the question of dogmatic development. In this text, the Dominican author stresses the fact that although the truths of faith are affected by technical elaboration (as is obvious to any observer of Church history[55]), nonetheless they retain a kind of close continuity with the pre-philosophical common-sense notions that serve as the basis of technical philosophical elaboration. Thus, the notions of *hypostasis*, person, *ousia*/substance, relation, society, sign, and so on used in various dogmatic declarations are there declared without their full connections to the philosophical systems

[54] One case where this question is treated in depth is in the relevant debates concerning whether one and the same thing can be "scientifically" known and believed (cf. *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 1, art. 5). For a textually informed treatment of this topic, see Daniel De Haan, "Harmonizing Faith and Knowledge of God's Existence in St. Thomas," in *Faith, Hope, and Love: Thomas Aquinas on Living by the Theological Virtues*, ed. Harm Goris, Lambert Hendriks, and Henk Schoot (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 137–160.

[55] Also recognized by his one-time fellow professor, Reginald Schultes, in his *Introductio in historia dogmatum* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1922).

giving birth to them. This means that such notions are lacking in something characteristic of the complete philosophical outlook that initially occasioned such dogmatic elaboration. Therefore, these notions are not consecrated *as philosophical*. Something similar can be said regarding the various theological schools, even if those schools' positions played an important role in the formulating of such truths of faith.[56]

Admittedly, as Fr. Guy Mansini has recently argued, this raises questions concerning the relationship that exists between such "common sense" and the temporal-historical conditioning of human knowledge, both rational and *De fide*.[57] This question concerning historicity will be briefly taken up in the closing section of this chapter. However, before that, a further question must be raised regarding the nature of the rational notions taken up for use in truths of faith.

The issue at hand is well summarized by the following remark by Fr. Ambroise Gardeil:

> The Church is a society, the sacraments are signs, sanctifying grace is a reality that exists in man, charity is a virtue . . . All this is true, but it is not at all true if the words are taken in their usual and ordinary meaning as might happen in a first consideration. Rather, to take one example, it is necessary to say what signs are in our natural lives. Have you, in fact, ever seen signs that by their own power efficaciously effect what they signify? And what is it that these sacramental sign effect? They produce something divine, a participation in our soul of the divine life itself. What a sacrament is in its innermost nature is inaccessible to our minds, just as is the Holy Trinity. And in the final analysis the mystery in both cases is the same.[58]

According to Thomas, because the truths of faith are *truths*, they are expressed in the form of judgments.[59] This means that "concepts" are not what is first and foremost revealed by supernatural faith. Rather, what are revealed are judgments, themselves comprising subject and predicate

[56] Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Thomistic Common Sense: The Philosophy of Being and the Development of Doctrine*, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2021), 217–299.

[57] See Guy Mansini, "The Historicity of Dogma and Common Sense: Ambroise Gardeil, Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, Yves Congar, and the Modern Magisterium," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 18:1 (2020): 111–138. For some indications in response to Mansini's well-founded concerns, see Matthew K. Minerd and Jon Kirwan (eds. and trans.), "Translators' Introduction: A Dialogue Delayed," in *The Thomistic Response to the Nouvelle Théologie: Concerning the Truth of Dogma and the Nature of Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 66–72.

[58] See Ambroise Gardeil, *Le donné révélé et la théologie*, 2nd ed. (Juivsy: Éditions du Cerf, 1932), 145. This passage is cited in Charles Journet, *The Wisdom of Faith*, trans. R. F. Smith (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1952), 16.

[59] See *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 1, art. 2.

notions that in some way must be rendered capable of expressing supernatural truths.[60]

Here, we encounter a topic at which Thomistic literature from the twentieth century reached an impasse, likely because it so clearly required development significantly beyond the express words of Aquinas, and the decades following the Second Vatican Council were marked by a Thomism that was more historically focused, where Thomism was practiced at all. As is well known, Thomas speaks about "analogy" regarding, in particular, metaphysical and theological discourse. However, as is equally well known, his thought concerning analogy is subject to fluctuation over the course of his writings, with different emphases and even different theoretical components expressed in various texts. This has given rise to a great host of interpretations over the course of the centuries and was the subject of protracted debates in the twentieth century.[61] At the core of Thomas's theory, however, is the claim that the human mind can signify certain realties having a community that is not unified by a single, univocal generic or specific notion (*ratio*), while also not so disunified that one's predication would fall into complete equivocation. Such analogical predication[62] involves, therefore, the articulation of multiple notions (*rationes*) that have some interrelated ordering.[63] Thus, when one speaks of the Aristotelian categories of being, a certain preeminence is accorded to

[60] See Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 1, 318n67: "the infused light of faith illuminates and elevates the notions and [intellectual] word by which the dogmatic formula is composed"; Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 1, 286: "This infused light illuminates and elevates the notions and verb [verbum] by which objective proposition is accomplished. Such notions can be naturally acquired ones, like the notions of person and nature. Nonetheless, such notions are supernaturally illuminated in such knowledge. Likewise, in judgment, the verb 'is' is affirmed not only naturally under the light of reason but also supernaturally under the divine light. Thus, the affirmation is infallible and proportioned to the supernatural object [in question]." Also see Garrigou-Lagrange, *On Divine Revelation*, vol. 1, 311, 313, 315n65, 544n42. Likewise, see the summary (with further citations) in Édouard Hugon, *Cursus philosophiae Thomisticae*, vol. 3, *Metaphysica* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1927), 136–137; Jean-Hervé Nicolas, *Dieu connu comme inconnu* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1966), 237–316; Nicolas, *Catholic Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 291, 330–331.

[61] For a summary, see the discussion and works cited in George Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy: A Textual Analysis and Systematic Synthesis* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1960); Joshua P. Hochschild, *The Semantics of Analogy: Rereading Cajetan's De Nominum Analogia* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

[62] The general perspective of analogy taken here is logical, not metaphysical. The latter (concerned with the metaphysical relations of likeness and dissimilarity among realities) is undoubtedly an important foundation for any logic of analogy.

[63] For a gathering of texts concerning such multiple rationes in analogy, see Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 78–82, 569–571. With an eye to later discussions as well, see the index entry "*Rationes* problem," in Dominic D'Ettore, *Analogy after Aquinas: Logical Problems, Thomistic Answers* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 204.

substance, which is presupposed for accidents such as *quality* or *quantity*. Nonetheless, each such category has its own manner of being, irreducible to the others. Moreover, the general notion of being that pertains to finite, created beings is second to the primary analogate of being: God, who is Uncreated and Unlimited Being. In this latter case of analogy, there is clearly a discrepancy between the perfection as applied to creatures and as applied to God. Sensitivity to this fact led Thomas on occasion to include as an essential aspect of the logic of analogy the Pseudo-Dionysian triad of causality, negation, and eminence: God is being in some manner because He is the cause of being;[64] however, He is not being in a finite, creaturely manner; rather, He is eminently Being.[65]

Now, amid the many debates concerning analogy discussed during the twentieth and twenty-first century, one can be excused for overlooking the question raised above: What are Thomists to say concerning the fact that notions from which supernatural faith judgments are formed are themselves natural? Although this issue has not been the subject of open debate in recent Thomist literature, it was not wholly overlooked by a number of important Thomists during the first half of the century.[66] The need for such a conceptual superelevation was explicitly taught by Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange,[67] with some prior preparation for this insight being furnished by Fr. Édouard Hugon.[68] A more detailed, explicit vocabulary of "the superanalogy of faith" was coined by Jacques Maritain,[69] taken up by Charles Journet,[70] and somewhat developed by

[64] On the nature of and distinction between "pure perfections" such as *being*, *goodness*, *intelligence*, *love*, etc., in contrast to those that are "mixed" and, hence, not formally predicable of God according to Thomas and the Thomists, see Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange , *God: His Existence and His Nature*, vol. 2, trans. Bede R. Rose (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1949), 33–42, 225–246.

[65] Concerning the notion of "formal-eminence" in analogy, in addition to the text cited in the previous note, see Garrigou-Lagrange, "On the Eminence of the Deity: In What Sense the Divine Perfections Are 'Formally and Eminently' in God," *Philosophizing in Faith*, trans. Matthew K. Minerd (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2019), 341–360. Regarding Thomas's dependence upon this Pseudo-Dionysian triad, see Fran O'Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 3–61; Klubertanz, *St. Thomas Aquinas on Analogy*, 64–76.

[66] So far, as I have discovered, all mentions have been very brief, without substantive engagement. Such allusions are found in French writers, and the theme has found no substantial mainstream purchase since the time of Maritain, Journet, and Nicolas. See Matthew K. Minerd, "The Superanalogy of Faith," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 23, no. 2 (2025): 589–614.

[67] See note 60. [68] See note 60.

[69] Jacques Maritain, *Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald Phelan et al. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 256–259; Maritain, "Reflections on Theological Knowledge," in *Untrammeled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 250–252.

[70] Charles Journet, *The Wisdom of Faith*, trans. R. F. Smith (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1952), 16–20; *The Dark Knowledge of God*, trans. James F. Anderson (Providence, RI: Cluny Media,

Jean-Hervé Nicolas[71] to explain this elevation of natural notions for use in supernatural truths.

A good example of such super-analogy is expressed in the following passage from Journet's *The Wisdom of Faith*:

> It is altogether necessary to insist on the mystery of the double use of the same concepts by reason, and by faith. When we say that God is one, that he is good, that he is wise, as well as when we say that God exists, and rewards those who seek him, the propositions, we are firm can veil, two different profundities. They can signify philosophical mystery, the mystery of perfect unity, of absolute goodness, of the fullness of being, and its providence, as these can be glimpsed by human reason through the mirror of creatures. In this case, God is known only by the fringe of his garments. But, they can also signify a revealed mystery, a mystery of faith, incomparably more profound: the mystery of the unity, goodness, being, and the providence of the God, who is a Trinity, and of him who became flesh for the salvation of the world. And in this case, God is known as he is in himself, in his personal life, but in the darkness of faith. These truths show us the uttermost profundities of God. They reveal to us God as He is in Himself, the God that is inaccessible to reason and whom we shall see in heaven, the God, however, who is attain here below, only in the darkness of faith.[72]

Here too, in this question of "super-analogy," we find ourselves faced with another aspect of the Thomistic perspective concerning the relationship between faith and reason, as well as the ways that philosophy can serve in the articulation of the non-opposition of certain natural notions to such supernatural utilization.

Finally, super-naturalized reason raises the question concerning the status of theological discourse as a "science."[73] For Thomas, who holds that theology is a kind of (subalternated) *scientia*,[74] this term "science" has,

2020), 62–65, 70n20, 78. The expression also is used on occasion in the various volumes of *L'église du verbe incarné*, with references back to *The Dark Knowledge of God*. Also, a restatement can be found in the midst of comments on the nature of the meaning of the message of the Gospel in Journet, *L'Église sainte mais non sans pécheurs: Compléments inédits de l'Église du Verbe Incarné* (Paris: Parole et Silence, 1999), 125–131.

[71] See note 60. The term "suranalogie" is also found in passing in Michel Labourdette, who seems to take the notion as an obvious given. See his letter to Maritain in *Journet-Maritain Correspondance*, vol. 3 (Saint-Maurice: Éditions Saint Augustine, 1998), 831.

[72] Journet, *The Wisdom of Faith*, 16–18.

[73] In point of fact, for St. Thomas, this *scientia* has a special character due to its preeminence, just as does metaphysics in the order of natural speculative theology. For this reason, he classes it (following Aristotle) as a kind of wisdom, *sapientia*. This status as *sapientia* left open questions calling for later development by the Thomist tradition. I discuss this at length in "Wisdom Be Attentive," 1103–1146.

[74] See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 1, art. 2–7. For a classic study of the history of the concerning the prehistory of this view of theology, see Marie-Dominique Chenu, *La Théologie comme science au xiii^e siècle*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1969). For a sense concerning the fourteenth-century scholastic discussions of subalteration in relation to theology, see Steven J. Livesey's introduction to Antonius de

as applied to human knowers,[75] a specific technical meaning, derived from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*: a single discourse, unified more or less remotely around a primary subject of attribution.[76] The structure of such a discourse seeks to articulate a main subject, the One and Triune God, and the whole of the "economy" of creation and salvation in relation to this one subject. The *Summa Theologiae* can be seen as an attempt to establish such an Aristotelian scientific structure for theological discourse, with each point of articulation (later referred to as "treatises") methodically considering the essence of the topic at hand, its principles, parts, causes, acts, effects, and other matters related *per se* thereto. Ultimately, all of this ratiocination is a task of understanding the articles of faith and their implications, using discursive means in order to achieve some small understanding of the revealed mysteries.

When one reads the structure and prologues of the questions in the text,[77] it becomes clear that Thomas is there attempting to set forth a scientific discourse concerning the mysteries of faith such that the *per se* connections from one topic to the next are very clear, thereby following general logical canons established by Aristotle in the *Posterior Analytics*.[78] It

Carlenis, *Four Questions on the Subalternation of the Sciences* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1994), vii–xxxv. For contemporary francophone discussions that seek to qualify the importance of subalternation in Thomas himself, see the discussion and notes in Humbrecht, *Thomas D'Aquin, Dieu et la métaphysique*, 521–528. For an excellent Thomistic account concerning the nature of demonstration in theology, see William Wallace, *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology: A Study of Methodology in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Thomist Press, 1963), 15–70. Livesy's other works echo the fact that can be found in others concerning how later discussions of subalternation were undertaken for the purely philosophical interest that many thinkers felt regarding the question of subalternation, which was important in the development of mathematicized physics. On this topic, see Bernard Mullahy, "Subalternation and Mathematical Physics," *Laval théologique et philosophique* 2:2 (1946): 89–107.

[75] Because of the perfection that it connotes, Thomas and Thomists will also use the term *scientia* to speak of the various kinds of Divine knowledge.

[76] See Wallace, *The Role of Demonstration in Moral Theology*, 144–147.

[77] Visually, the reader can consider the diagrams found in a text by Jacques-Joachim Berthier (an important early post-Leonine editor of Thomistic texts and scholar of Thomistic theological methodology), *Tabulae systematicae et synopticae totius summae theologiae*, 2nd ed (Paris: Lethielleux, 1903). Also, consider the analysis set forth in John of St. Thomas's *Isagoge* to the *Summa theologiae*, *Introduction to the Summa Theologiae of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Ralph McInerny (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2003); also, regarding aspects of the intra-question methods of St. Thomas, see Garrigou-Lagrange, "De methodo Sancti Thomae: speciatim de structura articulorum summae theologicae," *Angelicum* 5:4 (1928): 499–524.

[78] The general position I am taking is close to that of Wallace (note 74), though with some differences regarding the sapiential offices of discursive theology (note 73). However, the literature concerning the structure of the *Summa Theologiae* is vast and differentiated. For an introduction, at times differing in important ways from the present chapter, see Jean-Pierre Torrell, *Aquinas's Summa: Background, Structure, and Reception*, trans. Benedict M. Guevin (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2005); Ghislain Lafont, *Structures et méthode dans la "Somme*

would be the work of later generations of scholastics to explain the role to be played by "positive theology" and theological "discovery," although such attention to sources and dialectical exploration can be found "in exercise" through the various works of Aquinas.[79] It is impossible to understand both Thomas and the Thomists concerning these matters without taking seriously what they thought concerning the rational, discursive nature of the human intellect, especially as articulated in the *Topics* and *Posterior Analytics* of Aristotle.

6 Closing Remarks: The Historicity of Knowledge

I will close merely with a brief comment regarding Thomism and the historicity of human knowledge. It is a commonplace to say that the *prise de conscience* of historicity is something that marks the thought of the nineteenth century. For this reason, it would seem that the scholastics – especially a thirteenth-century scholastic such as Thomas – have little to say to those who are as historically conscious as we are today.

Such hesitations are at least partially merited, and it would be foolhardy to look for a fully formed theory of historicity in Thomas or even in the later Thomists. However, some have argued that important principles do exist for integrating historical awareness into the logical, noetic, and metaphysical principles of Thomism. Anton Pegis and Armand Maurer have proposed that Thomas's theory of cognition and the metaphysics of the human person's spiritual-embodied nature provide ample ground for the development of a fully Thomistic theory of historicity.[80] Moreover, in

théologique" de saint Thomas d'Aquin (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996); Albert Patfoort, *La somme de saint Thomas et la logique du dessein de dieu* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1998). I cannot, however, fail to note the ways in which the presentation in the notes above differs from that which still rules much of the popular imagination concerning the structure of the *Summa Theologiae*, namely the primordially neo-Platonic schema (*exitus-reditus*) famously set forth by Chenu. See Marie-Dominique Chenu, "The Plan of St. Thomas' *Summa theologiae*," trans. Ellen Bremner, *CrossCurrents* 2:2 (1952): 67–79. Certain insights can be gleaned from this, but by itself it risks implicitly denying the importance of sapiential-scientific articulation clearly operative in the structure of treatises, questions, and articles in the *Summa Theologiae*.

[79] For a discussion of the history of scholastic positive theology, see Celestine Luke Salm, "The Problem of Positive Theology," S.T.D. dissertation, The Catholic University of America, 1955. For the best Thomistic summary of the Thomistic discussions surrounding the treatise *De locis theologicis* (based on the dialectical logic of both Aristotle and Cicero, through Rudolph Agricola), see Doronzo, *Theologia dogmatica*, 399–544. The general objection and response format of Thomas's era represents an important aspect, also, of the dialectical establishment of the appropriate *endoxa* for the *status quaestionis* of the topic at hand.

[80] See Armand Maurer, *St. Thomas and Historicity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1979); Anton Pegis, *At the Origins of the Thomistic Notion of Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1963), 33–59.

the midst of the mid-twentieth-century crises concerning theological methodology, Frs. Michel Labourdette and Marie-Joseph Nicolas proposed a very detailed outline for a kind of Thomistic program to explain the various factors of historical relativity and development involved in human knowledge.[81] Finally, in a provocative but sui generis article, Jacques Maritain has made proposals concerning the relationship between historicity and evolution.[82]

Admittedly, however, this represents a domain where much work remains to be done by Thomism, especially in light of modern theories of hermeneutics and semiotics.[83] In the works of Thomas himself, one of the primary points of textual concern with history is to be found where he considers the development of revelation, the development of dogmas, and the correlated notion of implicit faith.[84] His relatively brief texts concerning these matters would serve later scholastics as a scaffolding for beginning to think through the question of dogmatic and doctrinal development.[85] Among all the projects that might be said to be ripe for Thomistic philosophy (and theology) in the twenty-first century, surely the logic, noetics, and metaphysics of historicity should be numbered among those of the greatest interest. No doubt, such investigations will bear witness to the way Thomistic thought, while carefully distinguishing between faith and reason, nonetheless provides a robust framework for philosophical labors that critically engage questions whose answers will provide Thomism with an opportunity to show the perennial vitality of its principles, methods, and tradition.

[81] See Marie-Michel Labourdette and Marie-Joseph Nicolas, "The Analogy of Truth and the Unity of Theological Science," in *The Thomistic Response*, 193–240. Also see the detailed correspondence between Labourdette, Journet, and Maritain in Charles Journet and Jacques Maritain, *Correspondance*, vol. 3 (1940–1949) (Fribourg: Éditions Saint-Augustine, 1998), 811–861.

[82] See Jacques Maritain, "Toward a Thomist Idea of Evolution," in *Untrammeled Approaches*, trans. Bernard Doering (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 85–132.

[83] Concerning Thomistic semiotics, one would be remiss not to mention the work of John N. Deely. For a comprehensive summary of his semiotic vision, see *Four Ages of the Understanding* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[84] For an introduction, see *Summa Theologiae*, IIaIIae qu. 1, art. 7 and 10; qu. 2, art. 6–8; qu. 5, art. 4; qu. 174, art. 6 and related parallel texts.

[85] Concerning implicit and explicit faith in particular, see Jacobus M. Ramirez, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 10 (*De fide divina*) (Salamanca: Editorial San Esteban, 1994), 232–254, 498–516; Reginald Schultes, *Fides implicita: Geschichte der Lehre von der fides implicita und explicita in der katholischen Theologie* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1920), 76–119; Eduard Dhanis, "Révélation explicite et implicite," *Gregorianum* 34:2 (1953): 187–237. Regarding the development of revelation and doctrine, see Schultes, *Introductio*, 46–296; Francisco Marín-Sola, *The Homogeneous Evolution of Catholic Dogma*, trans. Antonio T. Piño (Manilla: Santo Tomas University Press, 1988). Also see Guy Mansini, *The Development of Dogma: A Systematic Account* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2023); Matthew K. Minerd, "Dogmatic Development," *Encyclopedia of Catholic Theology*, https://www.ect.org/en/article/dogmatic-development.

CHAPTER 14

Aquinas and Continental Philosophy

Joshua Furnal

How can the medieval thought of St. Thomas Aquinas remain in dialogue with modern philosophy? To better imagine one possible negotiation, I present briefly the approach of the Italian Thomist and Kierkegaard scholar, Fr. Cornelio Fabro (1911–1995), to move contemporary scholarly discussions toward consensus on the matter. My argument is that Fabro's dialogue between Thomism and Existentialism centers on the question of the meaning of being (*esse*) and contingency with the aim of opening up the Existential question to the metaphysics of creation *ex nihilo* in terms of participation and the act of being. In Section 1, I make a historical observation that what is now taken as the canonical Thomist view of creation and freedom is indebted to Fabro's research on the metaphysics of participation. To highlight this fact, I rehearse briefly Fabro's exegetical recovery of the metaphysical distinction between factical existence (*existentia*) and being (*esse*) to show how this distinction is informed by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In Section 2, I construe Fabro's evaluation of Existential thought as a critique of a speculative scheme of necessary emanation or immanence. I advance the claim that a better theological understanding can be illuminated for Kierkegaard scholars by turning not to contemporary theology in the wake of Descartes, Hegel, and Heidegger but rather to an insight unearthed by Fabro regarding the topics of freedom, creation, and existence.

1 Metaphysics of Creation and the Act of Being

That there is a creation and a God that freely creates is available to the reach of human reason. However, that this Creator God is *triune* and that creation has a non-reciprocal relation of causal dependence with a temporal beginning *from nothing* is something that faith must

inform reason about so that it can be reflected upon.[1] The important difference between free creation from nothing and necessary emanation from caused causes is the difference between a logical outcome for a species that cannot be otherwise and God's free intentional action regarding individuals. Regarding participation, this does not imply that God's agency is mixed with human agency as a composite activity between kinds and individuals.[2]

Moreover, Fabro was in negative agreement with Existential thinkers in distinguishing existence (*existentia*) from being (*esse*). In a concise encyclopedia article on "Existence," Fabro defines *existentia* as "the fact that something is present in nature or in mind," which asserts that reality is "in act" or becoming in a spatiotemporal way.[3] Fabro explained that for Thomas, existence is the opposite of nonexistence and the immediate sensible (and thus reflective) experience of an intentional object is the basis upon which we distinguish between what is possible and what is actual in concrete (*In III sent*. Dist. 23, qu. 1, art. 2). For Thomas, the soul is the first principle of all our acts of sensing, understanding, and desiring (*De malo* qu. 6, art. 1 ad 18). Indeed, by encountering the fact *that* something exists, *existentia* also refers us to *what* something is (*essentia*). Fabro explained that in Greek thought, *existentia* was defined as the actualization of material essences, or what happens to something extrinsically and

[1] Joseph Wawrykow, "Aquinas and Bonaventure on Creation," in *Creation Ex Nihilo: Origins, Development, Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Gary A. Anderson and Markus Bockmuehl (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2018), 173–193, 191 n. 110. For more on the distinction between preamble and article of faith, see John F. Wippel, "Aquinas on Creation and Preambles of Faith," *The Thomist* 78:1 (2014): 1–36. On pp. 30–31, following Fabro, Wippel says that in *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 140, art. 1, Thomas distinguishes between a cause of becoming (*causa fiendi*) and a cause of existing (*causa essendi*) to emphasize the act and *ratio* of free creation that does not emanate by necessity from the same species of preexistent material. For more, see John F. Wippel, ed., *The Ultimate Why Question: Why Is There Anything at All Rather Than Nothing Whatsoever?* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), ch. 4; John F. Wippel, *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), ch. 9. For more on the difference between the classical view of an eternal world and the *ex nihilo* view of Thomas, see Mark Johnson, "Aquinas's Changing Evaluation of Plato on Creation," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66:1 (1992): 81–88. For the phrasing of a non-reciprocal relation of dependence and non-duality, see Sara Grant, *Towards an Alternative Theology: Confessions of a Non-Dualist Christian* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1991), 35–37, 48, 77.

[2] Relying on Fabro, recent interpreters of Thomas like Kathryn Tanner have made this point. For more, see Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1988), 63, 94. Tanner summarizes Cornelio Fabro, *Participation et causalité selon S. Thomas d'Aquin*, *Chaire Cardinal Mercier, 1954* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1961), 357ff., 372ff., 507ff.

[3] Fabro, *Selected Articles on Metaphysics and Participation* (Chillum: IVE Press, 2016).

accidentally in a series of emanating causes.[4] For Fabro, the result of such a view is that existence gets reabsorbed into the essence by necessity and conflates the possible and the real.[5]

Fabro contrasted the factical existence of what happens to a material essence with the early Christian view of free creation from nothing. For Fabro, created existence is not the necessary emanation of an essence but rather the contingent *and* dependent relation upon God's free gift of being.[6] Fabro notes that the Christian view is eclipsed by necessary emanation with Henry of Ghent in the thirteenth century, who viewed existence as the extrinsic and accidental fact of an essence passing from possibility to actuality (*Quodl.*, qu. 1, art. 9).[7] Fabro argues that this view of factical existence was pervasive in modern philosophy, which forgot Thomas's view of *esse* as the primary intensive act of being that distinguishes the Creator from creation.[8]

Fabro says that for Thomas, the meaning of *esse* refers not to the external accidental fact of an essence available to judgment, but to the primary intensive act of being. Fabro describes the created existing thing (*ens*) as composed of content (*essentia*) in potency to the activating act (*esse*).[9] The substantial creature *has* being by participation (*ens per participationem*), which refers to creaturely existence as both contingent *and* dependent upon the Creator (*In lib. De caus.* 6; *Comp. theol.* lib. I, cap. 68).[10] The relation between creaturely essence and being is described concretely in a predicamental way in terms of potency and act, but also in a universal or transcendental way as having *esse* by its intimate and intensive participation in the act of being (*actus essendi*) – the unreceived Pure Act of every act and

[4] Cornelio Fabro, "Platonism, Neoplatonism, Thomism: Convergencies and Divergencies," *The New Scholasticism* 44:1 (1970): 69–100. For more, see David B. Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). Also see David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (London: Routledge, 1979); Deirdre Carabine, *The Unknown God: Negative Theology in the Platonic Tradition: Plato to Eriugena* (Leuven: Peeters, 1995).

[5] Fabro, "Existence," 234.

[6] Fabro, "Existence," 231. Fabro's main target was "the formalism of late scholasticism by virtue of the emergence of *essentia* in the metaphysical structure of the created entity, and the subsequent oblivion of *esse*, debases *existentia* to a mere factual determination of *essentia*, and thus adequately resolves it in conceptual mediation, which amounts to the loss of ontological difference," in Giuseppe Pizzuti, *Il filosofo dell'actus essendi: la progressione teoretica dell'itinerario filosofico di Cornelio Fabro tra Tommaso d'Aquino e Søren Kierkegaard* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2011), 115.

[7] Fabro, "Existence," 232.

[8] Fabro, "Existence," 235.

[9] *De Potentia Dei*, qu. 7, art. 2 ad 9. Thomas says: "being [*esse*] is essentially distinct from that to which it is added and whereby it is determined. But nothing [*nihil*] extrinsic to being [*esse*] can be added to it since nothing [*nihil*] is outside it except non-being [*non-ens*], which can be neither form nor matter. Hence being [*esse*] is not determined by something else as potentiality by act but rather as act to potentiality."

[10] Fabro, "Existence," 235.

perfection of all perfections (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 1 ad 3).[11] In this way, Fabro distinguished between Creator and creature, to speak about a non-reciprocal participated relation between created existence and He who Is. Rather than being reserved solely for metaphysical speculation, Fabro argues that the "purely revelatory" and "dialectical emergence" of *esse* "as metaphysical act presupposes existential perception as much as intuition and abstraction, and is located at the apex of their convergence."[12] In this way, Fabro recovered Thomist metaphysics from going back down this formalist or essentialist path along with modern rationalists at the expense of the "unfathomableness of *existentia* in its metaphysical emergence from ontological nullity by virtue of creation *ex nihilo*."[13]

For Fabro, there is a real distinction in the metaphysical structure of the created entity between *essentia* and *existentia*, which finds expression in the participation of the entity in being. Thomas offers what Platonism and Aristotelianism both lack[14] – that is, an account of participation in being (*esse*) as the first and ultimate intensive act, which is informed by a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.[15] Following Parmenides, Thomas agrees that only being is and nothing is not. Hence there is nothing (*non-ens*) extrinsic to existing things (*ens*), which have being by participating in the act of being (*actus essendi*). The insight that Thomas offers regarding *esse* as intensive act involves "a new metaphysical principle" that *esse* "is the *act* of the participated entity as act of the potency that it receives."[16] For Fabro, "act of

[11] For more, see Cornelio Fabro, "The Intensive Hermeneutics of Thomistic Philosophy: The Notion of Participation," *The Review of Metaphysics* 27:3 (1974): 449–491. See also John Wippel's recent defense of Fabro's reading of Thomas on participation in his introduction to *Selected Articles on Metaphysics and Participation*, 1–26. Also see the short but incisive commentary by Elvio C. Fontana, *Metafisica Della Partecipazione: Genesi E Significato Della Scoperta Fabriana, Quaderni Fabriani* (Rome: EDIVI, 2011), 69ff.

[12] Fabro, "Existence," 238. [13] Pizzuti, *Il filosofo dell'actus essendi*, 115.

[14] Fabro treats the Platonic and Aristotelian views of participation in Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica Di Partecipazione Secondo S. Tommaso D' Aquino* [1st ed. 1939], 3rd ed. (Turin: Societá Editrice Internazionale, 1963), 46–74. Also see Fabro's brief summary, "Participation," in *Selected Articles on Metaphysics and Participation*, 215–226.

[15] Cornelio Fabro, *Tomismo E Pensiero Moderno, Cathedra Sancti Thomae, Pontificiae Universitatis Lateranensis* (Rome: Libreria Editrice della Pontificia Universitá Lateranense, 1969), 78, 108ff., 113–114. For more, see Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo, "L'Interpretazione Tomista della Creazione in Platone e Aristotle," in *Cornelio Fabro E Franz Brentano: Per Un Nuovo Realismo*, ed. Antonio Russo (Rome: Studium, 2013), 79–93.

[16] Fabro, *Tomismo e Pensiero Moderno*, 114. *De anima* lib. I, lec. 6, n. 2: "if there be anything which is subsistent *esse* itself – as we say God is – then that one participates in nothing at all. Other subsistent forms, however, must participate in *esse* as potency to act, so given that they are to this extent in potency, they can participate in something else"; translation cited in Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 31.

being" (*actus essendi*) refers "to *esse* in an intensive and constitutive sense regarding the sole substance and what actuates the substance or enables it to subsist."[17] Thus, it is not the case that God's creation is a fall from perfection since all of creation participates in God's goodness as a perfecting act of being that is gratuitously and freely received from the act of all acts.[18] This perfecting act of being that all creatures have by participation is in no way determined since there is nothing outside of being to be determined. The only thing that is "added" to the finite creature is the essential limitation of contingency: being what it is rather than not being at all. In this way, the factical existence of an essence (*existentia-essentia*) is distinguished from the act of being (*actus essendi*) that freely gives the creature to be by participation.

Unlike the existentialists, Fabro was interested in distinguishing divine and human making on the basis of creation *ex nihilo*. Whereas human making is contingent upon one's circumstances and preexistent material, divine making is neither contingent nor necessary because it is free and from nothing. Following Kierkegaard, Fabro views created existence "as the act of freedom to choose the Absolute and to base oneself on it," highlighting the analogy (difference and likeness) of God and humanity.[19] This is in contrast with an atheistic view of existence as merely choosing the finite, a choice between finite individuals and classes. In light of the difference between human and divine making, Fabro provides a philosophical account of being, truth, and freedom that at once is critical of Existentialism and addresses the demands that Existentialism itself was unable to meet.

To sum up, Fabro sets up the dialogue between Thomism and Existentialism, not between Platonic dualism and Aristotelian monism. Rather, the point of contact between these two schools of thought pertains

[17] Fabro, *Tomismo e Pensiero Moderno*, 119. Fabro cites Thomas's reason why the rational soul can only be made by creation: "'o be made is the way [*cum fieri sit via*] to existing [*ad esse*], a thing must be made in such a way that it is suitable to its mode of being [*esse*]. Now properly speaking 'to be' [*esse*] is that which itself has being [*habet esse*]; as it were, subsisting in its own being [*esse subsistens*]. Whereas only substances are properly and truly called entities [*entia*]; an accident does not have being [*non habet esse*], but rather is something (modified) by it, and so for this reason it is being called [*ens dicitur*]" (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 90, art. 2).

[18] In *Summa Theologiae*, Ia qu. 4, art. 2 ad 3. Thomas says: "a living thing [*vivens*] is more perfect than what merely exists [*ens*], because living things [*vivens*] also exist [*ens*] and intelligent things [*sapiens*] both exist [*ens*] and live [*vivens*]. Granting that in itself existence [*ens*] does not include life [*vivens*] and wisdom [*sapiens*], because it does not follow that what participates in being [*esse*], participates in every mode of being [*modum essendi*]; nevertheless God's to be [*esse*] includes in itself life [*vitam*] and wisdom [*sapientiam*], since there was no perfection of being [*perfectionibus essendi*] lacking for the One that is self-subsisting being [*ipsum esse subsistens*]."

[19] Fabro, "Existence," 234.

to the question of the meaning of being (*esse*) and contingency. Fabro argues that the best way to approach this question is not to limit it to the empirical realm of factical existence (*existentia*) but rather to open up the Existential question to the metaphysics of creation *ex nihilo*. In Fabro's view, creation provides a clue about our Existential attempts (and failures) at self-coincidence in terms of participation and the act of being. If modern philosophy derives the knowledge of contingent phenomena from an act of *consciousness* or judgment, Fabro wants to recover the search for the self-subsisting Absolute in terms of the presence of the existing thing to the act of *being* by participation.

2 Fabro's Assessment of Existentialism as Emanation Scheme

In the previous section, I surveyed Fabro's contribution to Thomist metaphysics in the form of an exegetical recovery regarding participation and the act of being in the writings of Aquinas. In this section, I claim that Fabro offers a critical genealogy of modern philosophy as a hermeneutical reply to the fundamental Existential problem of forgetting the meaning of being. Together, Fabro's exegetical recovery and hermeneutical critique provide a strategic point of contact between Thomism and Existential thought.

In the early 1940s, Luigi Pareyson (1918–1991) and Nicola Abbagnano (1901–1990) were the most prominent Italian philosophers engaging with the philosophy of existence in the writings of Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Fabro grew dissatisfied with their treatment of Kierkegaard, which was based upon poor German translations.[20] The state of the question in Italy during this period was to ascertain whether the emphasis upon human subjectivity in Existentialism was indebted to a version of Idealism or Realism. Fabro claimed that there was an unexplored tension here because the emphasis upon self-transcendence in Existential thought construed human existence as a real object beyond conceptual representation, and yet the emphasis upon the nothingness of Being prevented some (atheistic) Existential thinkers from giving a positive metaphysical account of human subjectivity.

In Fabro's view, there was no logical alternative for Existential thought: The question of God or divine transcendence required an adequate reply if Existentialism was to avoid the epistemic threat that our knowledge of

[20] For more on the Kierkegaard Renaissance in Europe and Fabro's dissatisfaction with it, see Joshua Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 67ff.

human subjectivity is only partial, individual, and limited to a contingent perspective that cannot be shared by another human being. After 1940, Fabro turned to engage the critiques of rationalism advanced by Existentialism, and Kierkegaard's writings in particular, to draw out the Augustinian emphasis of contemporaneity with Christ as a corrective to self-deception in the pursuit of the knowledge of God.[21] Not only did this turn enable Fabro to renew Thomism with Existential questions but it also situated Fabro as a critic of Suarezian Neo-Scholasticism and Hegelian Idealism (and its fascist proponents in Italy).[22]

Fabro's main concern with modern Existentialism was an extension of his concern with medieval essentialism. In other words, when one worries about the priority of existence over essence, an account of the existing thing is often framed solely in terms of the factical existence of an essence (*essentia-existentia*), which struggles to hold open a place for being (*esse*) and risks forgetting it altogether. By framing the creature's development entirely within the created order, one falls back into a debate between monism and dualism about the necessary relationship of types and tokens in an emanation scheme of necessity. On Fabro's view, this is to speak of participation solely in predicamental terms regarding what can be said to happen to a creature rather than the transcendental participation of the creature's dependence upon the Creator. Here Fabro sees an opportunity for a Thomistic ontology of the act of being (*esse ut actu*) to be provided as a corrective resource to Existential thought, which construes existing as the necessary fact of becoming (*esse in actu*) nothing.

Already by 1942, Fabro had realized the problem of siphoning out the religious aspects of Kierkegaard's writings to present him mainly as

[21] For more on Augustine's influence on Kierkegaard, see Lee C. Barrett, *Eros and Self-Emptying: The Intersections of Augustine and Kierkegaard* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013). Also see Christopher B. Barnett, "'Rest' as Unio Mystica? Kierkegaard, Augustine, and the Spiritual Life," *Spiritus* 16:1 (2016): 58–77; Robert Puchniak, "Kierkegaard's 'Self' and Augustine's Influence," in *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, ed. Heiko Schulz, Jon Stewart, and Karl Verstrynge (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2011), 181–194; George Pattison, "Heidegger, Augustine, and Kierkegaard: Care, Time, and Love," in *The Influence of Augustine on Heidegger: The Emergence of an Augustinian Phenomenology*, ed. Craig J. N. De Paulo (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), 153–186. See also relevant essays in Kim Paffenroth, John Doody, and Helene Tallon Russell, eds., *Augustine and Kierkegaard, Augustine in Conversation: Tradition and Innovation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).

[22] For more on the Italian appropriation of German Idealism and Existentialism, see Elvio Celestino Fontana, *Fabro E L'esistenzialismo* (Rome: EDIVI, 2010), 11–24. Also see "The Hegelians," in Eugenio Garin and Giorgio A. Pinton, *History of Italian Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008), ch. 35; A. James Gregor, *Giovanni Gentile: Philosopher of Fascism* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Nino Langiulli, *Possibility, Necessity, and Existence: Abbagnano and His Predecessors* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992).

a philosopher.[23] In Fabro's view, the philosophical and religious aspects of Kierkegaard's writings are inseparable: "the problem of 'how the single individual saves their own reality' has, in fact, its response in the problem of 'how is it possible today to become a Christian again'."[24] Fabro writes that for Kierkegaard (contra Hegel), the starting point is not real versus possible existence but rather "the real is the 'single individual'. Existence is a feature of *this*, *here*, *now*, rather than a thought about an impersonal totality."[25] Fabro's Italian contemporaries tended to focus mainly on Kierkegaard's notion of paradox and the moment of decision, which highlighted the fact that we must choose in the present how to lead our lives toward the future. In Fabro's view, this was only a partial presentation of Kierkegaard's thought, which left aside Kierkegaard's reforming emphasis upon returning to original Christianity and contemporaneity with Christ.[26]

Fabro traces the scholarly omission to leave Kierkegaard's Christianity aside back to the influence of Karl Barth and Martin Heidegger. Fabro claims that both Barth and Heidegger conceptually resolved Kierkegaard's paradox of eternity in time by either opting for only one horn of the paradox or by repeating the paradox within only one of its terms. Fabro observes that in both cases – Barth's Reformed theological anthropology and Heidegger's neo-Scholastic ontology – the finite human creature is pictured as an idolatrous or inauthentic nothing that must be negated before God or death. For this reason, Pareyson introduced the work of Karl Jaspers in Italy as a means to recover some positive notion of self-transcendence. Fabro interprets this emphasis on self-transcendence as an attempt to safeguard the human *person* in the modern age. But for Fabro, this is bound to fail when Existential thinkers negotiate self-transcendence in Avicennian terms: the factical existence of an essence (*existentia-essentia*).

In Fabro's view, self-transcendence will inevitably fail to "explain the central act of existence, the choice: there is no place for a true decision since you can only decide to be what you are, you cannot *not* be and yet one day you will be no longer."[27] In the end, Fabro's concern is that although Pareyson is a "lucid expositor and acute critic," his emphasis upon self-transcendence remains indebted to the Idealist affirmation of a transcendental or universal self that fails to give a proper reply to the problem of the human person, which is the basic aim of Existential

[23] Cornelio Fabro, "La Filosofia Dell' Esistenza," *Divus Thomas* 45 (1942): 452–454. This is Fabro's review of Luigi Pareyson's book on Jaspers entitled *La filosofia dell'esistenza e Carlo Jaspers* (Naples: Loffredo, 1940).

[24] Fabro, "La Filosofia," 452. [25] Fabro, "La Filosofia," 452. [26] Fabro, "La Filosofia," 453.

[27] Fabro, "La Filosofia," 453.

thought.[28] For Fabro, this indicates a fundamental shortcoming in Italian philosophy to overcome the Avicennian picture of emanation by a disembodied agent intellect, which can be remedied by reconsidering Thomas's metaphysics of creation *ex nihilo*. But the leap between Thomas and Existential thought remains too great. For this reason, Fabro seeks to recover the theological inheritance of Kierkegaard's critique of Idealism, which remains absent in Italian Existential thought.

2.1 *Overturning Avicennian Emanation in Existentialism*

The basic features of Fabro's Kierkegaardian critique of modern philosophy are rooted in the often overlooked distinction Thomas Aquinas makes between free creation and necessary emanation. For Fabro, the principle of immanence is basically a modernized version of the emanation scheme put forward by Plato and Aristotle, which presumes the eternity of the world. On such a scheme, existence is framed in terms of the accidental occurrence of an essence, or in other words, what happens to something – a caused cause. The label "essentialist" or "formalist" is often used to describe this position in order to contrast Thomas's position as "existential" – or not starting with what can be said about x as a property (*essentia*) but rather that x is (*ens*).[29] For Fabro, the Cartesian *cogito* refers to a property or what can be said about someone – that they think – and thus operates within the discourse of necessary emanation (*cogito ergo sum*), which is bound to fail when the enquiry turns to search for a beginning without presuppositions. This form of enquiry fails to become concrete since it is confined to infinite possibility rather than reality like searching for an empty world that might have been but is not. One might entertain this as an abstract form of logical daydreaming but it is not empirically factual.

In 1943, Fabro published a short introduction to Existentialism that briefly surveyed the significance of Existential themes in Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche, and the structure of existence in Heidegger, Jaspers, and Abbagnano.[30] The book concludes with an overview of

[28] Fabro, "La Filosofia," 454.

[29] For a succinct account of the shift from "essentialism" to "existentialism" in medieval philosophy, see Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable God*, ch. 2. Also see Eric L. Mascall, *Existence and Analogy: A Sequel to "He Who Is"* (1st ed. 1949), 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), chs. 2 and 3.

[30] Cornelio Fabro, *Introduzione All' Esistenzialismo* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 1943). Fabro provides a snapshot of his understanding of Kierkegaard at this time: "For Kierkegaard, *existing* is being anxious about nothing and about sin; it is to choose eternity in the instant; it is to be passionate; it is to become; it is to be isolated – as an individual and person – and to be subjective: it is to know

Gabriel Marcel's signature ideas regarding the foundation of existence and a comparison with Thomism. Fabro's comparison is drawn on the basis of the contingency of embodiment and the inscrutability of being, which he sees emphasized in both Existentialism and Thomism.[31] Fabro goes on to remind his reader that

> [the] object of metaphysics is the *entity*, that which has the *act of being*, that which *participates* being. In it then the fundamental structure of the real is given by the synolon of subject and form, of act and potency, and, for the entity as such, of essence and act of being. The essence here is not a possible, an abstract essence . . . [but rather] a real essence, singular, because the entity is always a single individual; the act of being, then, is not only the so-called "existence" as the *fact* of existing, the exterior position (*ex-sistere*) of being, but the primary and profound realization of being that remains at the foundation of all being and appearing that come to the entity in its development. The essence gives the content; the act of being is its realization: the entity is given by their mysterious union.[32]

In that same year, Fabro published a review essay on the status of Existential thought in Italy, in which he argues that Existentialism begins as a critique of Idealism but ultimately returns to Hegel.[33] Fabro observes that due to an insufficient engagement with Kierkegaard's critique of the logic of bad infinity in Fichte, Abbagnano's Italian Existentialism remains indebted to Giovanni Gentile's view of the mere possible as having actual existence, which recalls Avicenna's view of *existentia*.[34] Alternatively, Fabro prefers Jean Wahl's depiction of Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism, which opposes "the leap to mediation, the paradox to synthesis, heterogeneity to homogeneity,

oneself as a sinner and to recognize oneself as always in the wrong before God, to believe in Him, to suffer for Him, to love Him, in a presence that no one can hinder" (44; my translation).

[31] Fabro, *Introduzione all' Esistenzialismo*, 154: "even for Thomism, the roots of existence (matter and freedom) remain incomprehensible to the human intellect and they refer to the intellect and free will of God; indeed the will especially, because every created existence, and thus even its principles – matter for the corporeal world and the will in the rational world – since they are real, they are placed 'outside' divinity, and their existence depends upon an act of supreme freedom. The 'mystery' then is the foundation of Thomist realism, which has never acquiesced to the ambitions of Enlightenment 'reason' whether in pre-Kantian or post-Kantian metaphysics."

[32] Fabro, *Introduzione*, 157.

[33] Cornelio Fabro, "Rassegna Sull' Esistenzialismo Italiano," *Divus Thomas* 46:3 (1943): 431–440. This essay was expanded and revised seven years later; see Cornelio Fabro, "Rassegna Dell'esistenzialismo," *Divus Thomas* 53:2 (1950): 265–273.

[34] For more, see R. S. Harris, "Fichte E Gentile," *Giornale Critico della Filosofia Italiana* 18 (1964): 543–562. Also see Wayne M. Martin, "In Defense of Bad Infinity: A Fichtean Response to Hegel's *Differenzschrift*," *Hegel Bulletin* 28:1–2 (2007): 168–187 and Giovanni Gentile, "Basic Concepts of Actualism," *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies* 20:1–2 (2014): 343–359.

and transcendence to immanence."[35] For Fabro, these anti-Hegelian themes in Kierkegaard's writings uncover the "true existential bite that alone provides the vision for the life of humankind in the reality of our contemporary and historical situation" and it is *this* Kierkegaard, "the only authentic one, who remains faithful to the theological direction," that is worth retrieving in Protestant and Catholic Theology.[36] Fabro's stance is made clear in a 1943 conference paper: "the existent is the single individual – and here Kierkegaard, recalling Aristotle: the universal does not exist *per se*. At least regarding human beings, the individual is the human person who is superior to the species and it is the materialist and totalitarian conceptions that see the single individual in service to the collective."[37]

Fabro points out that Kierkegaard's reading of Aristotle is indebted to the German logician F. A. Trendelenburg (1802–1872), and this serves as a foundational link between the classical Realism that informed Thomas's and Kierkegaard's writings.[38]

In a 1951 article, Fabro approves of the way Existentialism prioritizes freedom as a key feature of being human – that we are "ahead of ourselves" and we "become who we are through our freedom" as we relate to the world and to God.[39] For Fabro, "the being of the human as freedom precedes rather than follows this relation and we would no longer be human if it was added on."[40] Thus, for Existentialism, Fabro says that the human essence is "not identical with other essences in the world" and "we would no longer be human and even God would no longer be God, if this freedom was essentially limited but rather it is precisely in choosing

[35] Fabro quotes directly from Jean Wahl, *Études Kierkegaardiennes* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1938), 163.

[36] Fontana, *Fabro E L'esistenzialismo*, 33. For example, Fabro specifically mentions the theological engagement with Kierkegaard by dialogical thinkers like Karl Barth, Ferdinand Ebner, Emil Brunner, Martin Buber, and John Cullberg along with Catholic converts like Theodor Haecker and Erik Peterson.

[37] Cornelio Fabro, "L' Esistenzialismo," *Acta Pont. Academiae Romane S. Thomae Aquinatis et Religionis Catholiciae* 8 (1943): 154–191. This quotation comes from 156.

[38] For more, see Cornelio Fabro, "Actuality. Reality," in *Concepts and Alternatives in Kierkegaard (Bibliotheca Kierkegaardiana, 3)* (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 1980), 111–113. See also Giovanni Magri, "Il 'Salto Della Libertá': La Critica Di Trendelenburg Alla Dialettica Hegeliana Nella Ricezione Di Kierkegaard," *Rivista di Filosofia Neo-Scolastica* 96:1 (2004): 87–143; Jon Stewart and Katalin Nun, eds., *Kierkegaard and the Greek World: Aristotle and Other Greek Authors [Krsrr 2:2]* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010). Also see Robert C. Robert's comparison of Aquinas and Kierkegaard on the emotions in Alastair Hannay and Gordon Daniel Marino, *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 7. For a treatment that interprets Trendelenburg within the German Idealist tradition, see Frederick C. Beiser, *Late German Idealism: Trendelenburg and Lotze* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ch. 3.

[39] Cornelio Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," *Salesianum* 13 (1951): 189–190.

[40] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo."

one's own being" that one discovers that one has a life that one must choose to lead.[41] Fabro describes being human as "the adventure of freedom" and, following Heidegger, he says that "the essentially human is to be 'the subject *of* being' where being is precisely the essential qualification of the human." Moreover, Fabro argues that the being of the human is essentially transcendence, "a being-outside of the subject in being itself" along with others, and that means human transcendence is "being in the world and projecting oneself as freedom." In other words, Fabro employs Heidegger's terms to describe human existence as self-transcendence in two ways: (i) the temporal everyday life of being in the world and (ii) the freedom to be oneself and to lead one's life as a project. The fact that we are not identical with our life project but that we have a life to lead is the kind of temporal self-transcendence that Fabro refers to as a core Existential idea that Heidegger develops, which can be useful in a dialogue with Thomism. In short, Fabro argues that "being is prior to its modes and forms: it is neither something immediate nor mediate because mediacy and immediacy are extraneous reflective categories applied to being."[42] At this point, Fabro pivots to introduce a transcendent Absolute that is not merely a finite representation of a synthesis or sum total, but rather Pure Act.

To sum up, Fabro argues that Existentialism offers Thomism a "metaphysical sense of existence that is proper to being human that is not likened to the '*actus essendi*' shared by all creatures and thus without a history and without any risks from the existence that threatens the ultimate demand of human freedom."[43] Moreover, Fabro says that by learning from Existentialism, "Thomism can deepen its metaphysical account of the structure of the finite spirit that exists in time" to better appreciate the Existential component to faith and illuminate the dialectic of salvation in terms of the actuation of being as destiny. Fabro concludes that "Heidegger's polemic, for what it is worth, is right to criticize the 'formalistic' metaphysics that uniquely distinguish between a real and a possible entity, but this is not what St. Thomas does, who claims that in the entity there is a real founding duality of *essentia* and *esse*."[44] For Fabro, "the originary value that St. Thomas attributes to *esse*, as ultimate act, act of all acts, the foundation then of every reality and every presence" is a "deepening of Thomism in an Existential sense" in a way that resembles

[41] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo."
[42] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 191.
[43] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 198.
[44] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 200.

Heidegger's project.[45] In this way, Fabro accepts Heidegger's critique of metaphysics but qualifies his response through a dialogue between St. Thomas and Kierkegaard to distinguish the self-transcendence of being-in-the-world from having being by participation in divine Transcendence.

In short, Fabro's claim is that the forgetfulness of being that Heidegger rightly identifies loses its way with the forgetfulness of the act of being. To try to recover being solely in terms of factical existence or being-in-the-world is to limit oneself to immanence, which offers the false choice of either Cartesian dualism or phenomenological monism. This is the modern problem that Fabro seeks to sidestep by distinguishing *esse* from *existentia* with his notion of participation and act of being (*actus essendi*). If Thomism seeks to avoid Cartesian dualism or phenomenological monism and have a dialogue with Existential thought, Fabro argues that an acquaintance with Kierkegaard's writings is required. What remains to be seen is how Fabro connects Thomistic metaphysics and Existential thought using Kierkegaard's writings in particular on the basis of creation *ex nihilo*.

2.2 *The Distinction*

In his *Reflections on Freedom*, Fabro argued that to recover the notion of truth and freedom in late modernity, a distinction must be drawn between Hegel's *quantitative* dialectic and Kierkegaard's *qualitative* dialectic.[46] For Hegel, world history is presented as the whole truth of being, which features as a cornerstone of his philosophical system. On this quantitative view of dialectic, the One essential idea emanates or develops necessarily in the many existing institutions, and objectivity is episodic (RL 222 n. 2). Alternatively for Kierkegaard's qualitative dialectic, the whole is relativized by free creation from nothing, and each single individual is a free spiritual subject "before God." The subjectivity of interiority is emphasized here to highlight not only the commitment "before God" in creation but also "before Christ" in redemption. On this view, becoming more Christian is the measure of one's lifespan and indicates the whole. For Kierkegaard, the path of self-actualization dialectically combines human freedom and the act of faith to illuminate (i) the metaphysical Absolute as the foundation and goal of freedom itself; and (ii) the soteriological foundation of the forgiveness of sin and the exemplary goal of the imitation of Christ (RL

[45] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 200.
[46] Fabro, *Riflessioni sulla libertà* (Rimini: Maggioli, 1983). Henceforth RL.

221). Fabro observed that Kierkegaard unites freedom and faith dialectically on the basis of existing, which invokes at once (i) the metaphysical distinction between being and thought, (ii) the Existential distinction between thinking and willing, and (iii) the theological distinction between Christian discipleship and mere religious affiliation.

For Fabro, the risk in Hegel's position fails to avoid determinism between the collective universal and the particular type, which is only ever being apparent in its manifestation and abandoning truth in its passing away (RL 223). The advantage of Kierkegaard's approach is in the way the relation between universal and particular is subordinate to the Absolute, on which depends (non-reciprocally) the single individual's capacity for truth and the exercise of freedom's responsibility.

In post-Hegelian philosophy and in Existential thought, human freedom becomes finite as thrownness in a quantitative and univocal way. Indeed, Fabro argued that in Barthian theology, the Wholly Other becomes a separate transcendent perfection to the degree that the foundation of human freedom is alienated from itself in an equivocal way that cannot overcome the fate of predestination (RL 222 n. 3). As a result, *either* the eternal history of being absorbs the whole of temporal history at the vanishing point of its passing away *or* the nonbeing of temporal history annihilates the eternal history of being. For Fabro, the trajectory from Hegel to Heidegger is shot through with this quantitative dialectic, and a negotiation between Thomas Aquinas and Kierkegaard is warranted to recover the qualitative dialectic of created freedom.

3 Concluding Remarks

At first glance, it seems strange that a Thomist would have an interest in anything outside of the writings of Thomas Aquinas, let alone a group of Existential thinkers seeking to discard "outdated" medieval pictures of reality. But this is why Fabro continues to be of interest today; he argued that a mutually beneficial dialogue could take place between these different perspectives. In a journal entry from 1946, Yves Congar OP writes that Fabro paid him a visit "to talk to me especially about Kierkegaard. He learnt Danish in order to be able to read him. And he knows him magnificently well. Very open on modern philosophical trends."[47] In

[47] Yves Congar, *Yves Congar: Journal of a Theologian (1946–1956)* (Hindmarsh: ATF Theology, 2015), 134. The date of the entry is from Saturday May 18, 1946. This is the same year that Congar met Fabro's friend, Erik Peterson, who told Congar that "the clerical atmosphere in Rome [is] stifling"

response to the Kierkegaard Renaissance that swept through Europe during the early twentieth century, Fabro learned Danish and became one of the most important yet overlooked European translators and interpreters of Kierkegaard's writings.[48] In a 1973 letter to a colleague, Fabro wrote: "Perhaps my long and obstinate work of translating and interpreting Kierkegaard was internally related to my conflict with the essentialism-atheism of modern thought: in fact in this disagreement, Kierkegaard constantly stimulated me and still does so now."[49] Indeed, Fabro's work on Kierkegaard remains one of the underappreciated hallmarks of Italian philosophical heritage in the twentieth century.[50]

It must be said that Fabro's appropriation of Kierkegaard was never intended to make Kierkegaard something he was not. However, the fact of this appropriation indicates a structural affinity in reference to metaphysical Realism that is worth taking into consideration, especially from the perspective of Catholic theology after the Second Vatican Council. Fabro's synthesis involved three parts: (i) to assert the primacy of *being* as the metaphysical foundation of thought; (ii) to see ethico-religious *interiority* as a vital feature of real human existence; and (iii) to recover the *free commitment* to the risen Christ as the intersection of eternity and time.[51] In this way, Fabro sees a structural affinity between the approaches of Kierkegaard and St. Thomas to the philosophical topics of being, truth, and freedom. The topics of subjectivity, history, and theological reasoning are pertinent in this regard and the task of navigating between Cartesian metaphysics and Romanticism invites Fabro's reading of Kierkegaard's writings and a comparison with the Thomist revival after *Aeterni Patris* (1879), which shares a similar context.

In 1950, Pope Pius XII issued an encyclical that condemned "a new erroneous philosophy" named Existentialism.[52] For a philosopher like Fabro, who sought to remain in accord with Church teaching, the language of the encyclical called for a nuanced interpretation because *Humani Generis* takes a different approach to denouncing errors from its

(p. 419). Fabro's name appears again on p. 420 in an entry dated Sunday December 19, 1954 where Congar is strategizing about who to speak with to get access to Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani via Mgr Pietro Parente, who allegedly played a part in the condemnation of M. D. Chenu (419) and who was the Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Propaganda College where Fabro taught philosophy at the time.

[48] For more, see Furnal, *Catholic Theology after Kierkegaard*.

[49] Pizzuti, *Il Filosofo Dell'actus Essendi*, 44.

[50] Pizzuti, *Il Filosofo Dell'actus Essendi*, 142–145.

[51] Pizzuti, *Il Filosofo Dell'actus Essendi*, 146.

[52] *Humani Generis* (HG), n. 6, http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xii_enc_12081950_humani-generis.html.

predecessor *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907). In a 1951 article, Fabro observes that unlike *Pascendi*, "which follows systematically the logical thread of errors down to their roots to expose point by point their erroneous architecture," *Humani Generis* instead "proceeds by substantial and programmatic points that the Catholic scholar must attend to if they are not to get lost in the labyrinth of new errors."[53]

In Fabro's view, the encyclical makes four points in the form of two condemnations and two invitations. The two condemnations can be interpreted as a condemnation of a monistic emanation scheme, whether it comes in the form of an evolutionary ontology of dialectical materialism (HG n. 5) or the historicism of atheistic Existentialism (HG n. 32). Fabro goes on to emphasize that the two invitations would seem to be mutually exclusive: for Catholic scholars and priests to engage in a deeper study of the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (HG n. 33) *and* modern thought (HG n. 43). But Fabro notes that this is the first time that "the ecclesiastical magisterium solemnly recognizes the usefulness of a close and in-depth study of modern thought."[54] In particular, Fabro takes this invitation to mean that the new encyclical encourages Catholic scholars "to determine the precise significance of Existentialism" and "to study the relationship between Existentialism and Thomism" because "no Catholic scholar can remain indifferent to these two problems" and this "new philosophy has a structure of its own and it cannot be reduced to any other conceptual system."[55]

In dialogue with Existential thought, Fabro put forward an account of the finite creature in terms of the affirmation of the real composition of intelligible essence and participated act having being (*essentia-esse*, *actus essendi*) rather than the logical formulation of the factical existence of an essential attribute (*existentia-essentia*), which enables him, among other things, to forestall the essentialist versus existentialist debates about the ontological and epistemic priority of knowing *what* something is (*essentia*) before discovering *that* something is (*existentia*).[56] Fabro also offered a participatory ontology of creation that links Aristotle's movement of act and potency to Plato's view of participation in an original way to say of

[53] Fabro, "L'assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 185–201. Quotation translated from 186.
[54] Fabro, "L'Assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 186.
[55] Fabro, "L'Assoluto Nel Tomismo E Nell'esistenzialismo," 186–187.
[56] For more about the impact of this debate on early modern philosophy, see Jorge Secada's essay in Stephen Gaukroger, ed., *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes' Meditations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), ch. 5. Also see Han Thomas Adriaenssen, *Representation and Scepticism from Aquinas to Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

every existing creature that it is really composed of a prior intensive act (*esse*) and a receptive capacity (*essentia*) that freely participates in the perfecting act of being that is the ultimate act of every act. Fabro's participatory ontology enables him to endorse an analogy (dissimilarity and likeness) between finite creatures (participated act) and the infinite Creator (unreceived Act) in light of creation *ex nihilo*.

To sum up, in the first section of this chapter, I explored Fabro's exegetical recovery of the metaphysical distinction between factical existence (*existentia*) and being (*esse*) to show how this distinction is informed by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In the second section, I surveyed Fabro's hermeneutical critique of Existential thought and how it remains indebted to a speculative scheme of necessary emanation or immanence.

Fabro claims that in Italy, Existential thought arrives at a critical transition in modern thought between neo-Scholasticism on the one hand and Hegelian Idealism on the other. Fabro argues that metaphysically speaking, Existential thinkers are faced with a dilemma that cannot be resolved logically without either succumbing to the Idealism that they seek to undermine or by embracing Realism. The logical consequence of this metaphysical dispute impacts whether one understands the Absolute in terms of a conceptual representation (*cogito*) or self-subsistent Being (*esse ipsum subsistens*). By making such an observation, Fabro identified the linchpin metaphysical issue at the intersection of Existential thought and Thomism: whether the participation between the One and the Many is best understood in terms of necessary emanation (*existentia-essentia*) or free creation from nothing (*essentia-actus essendi*). Fabro concludes that Existential thinkers risk remaining indebted to a Cartesian ontology without reconsidering the theological aspects of Kierkegaard's writings, which opens up a path for future dialogue with Thomism.

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